

TO: Panelists, Blue Ribbon Panel on School Safety
FROM: Marissa Roy, Chief Consultant to the Blue Ribbon Panel on School Safety
RE: Minutes from April 8th Public Hearing

Shortly after the tragic mass shooting at Marjorie Stoneman Douglas High School, this Blue Ribbon Panel on School Safety was created to bring together experts and leaders in a wide array of areas including education, public safety, mental health, architecture, government, gun violence prevention and the faith-based community to review school safety measures currently in place at the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) as well as look into any additional approaches that might enhance these efforts. The Blue Ribbon Panel is conducting seven hearings—one in each LAUSD school board district—to hear presentations on different aspects of school and community safety as well as invite public comment.

The first Blue Ribbon Panel hearing took place on April 8th from 2 p.m. to approximately 5 p.m. at Hollywood High School in LAUSD District 4, represented by LAUSD Board Vice President Nick Melvoin. The Panel Co-Chair Los Angeles City Attorney Mike Feuer began the first panel hearing by emphasizing that students across the nation have given leaders at all levels the imperative to take action to enhance school safety. He explained that the Blue Ribbon Panel would be examining school safety from a variety of vantage points with the goal of making students safer at schools. City Attorney Feuer then introduced Board Member Melvoin. Drawing on his experience as an educator, Board Member Melvoin stressed the importance of advocating for policies that increase student safety, assuring students that they are being heard in the wake of Parkland. After these addresses, each member of the Blue Ribbon Panel introduced themselves and described their personal and professional investment in student safety.

The first first Blue Ribbon Panel hearing aimed to give panelists and members of the public an overview of the school safety policies already in place at LAUSD to provide a starting point from which the Blue Ribbon Panel could examine specific aspects of school safety. The hearing featured an introduction from Interim Superintendent Vivian Ekchian and a presentation from Chief of the Los Angeles School Police Department (LASPD) Steve Zipperman.

In her introduction, Interim Superintendent Ekchian echoed the call to action in the wake of the school shooting at Parkland. She urged the panel and the public to take this national moment not only to reimagine the future of students as it relates to safety, but also to come together as a city to put students first. Superintendent Ekchian noted that safety in schools and safety in the community are one in the same, and thus students should be prioritized by policymakers and stakeholders across the city and state.

Chief Zipperman then began his presentation with an overview of LAUSD and LASPD. LAUSD's jurisdiction spans 710 square miles with over 1000 schools serving 618,970 children. LASPD has 542 personnel serving LAUSD schools in six bureaus with 390 sworn officers and 110 school safety officers (SSOs), civilian non-armed LASPD employees. At least one sworn LASPD officer is present at every high school in LAUSD, and most middle schools have a sworn LASPD or SSO present. Elementary schools are supported by patrolling officers who are responsible for an average of fifteen square miles per officer.

Chief Zipperman described the role of the campus-based sworn LASPD officers and SSOs as security-based—officers’ priority is protecting students from threats and enforcing protections on campus—as well as supportive. Chief Zipperman emphasized LASPD officers and SSOs as role models, counselors, and team members on campuses. To ensure security at LAUSD, Chief Zipperman discussed how LASPD partners with the LAUSD Division of District Operations to promulgate safety bulletins, help schools develop integrated safe school plans, train school personnel on active shooter responses, track daily incidents of threats at schools, and liaison with local districts and schools. In its supportive role, LASPD provides mentorship programs for students interested in police work, the Police Academy Magnet Program, or government, the Explorers Program. LASPD also partners with LAUSD’s School Health and Human Services Department to help execute threat assessments and implement restorative justice initiatives. In particular, the transition to restorative justice techniques has reduced student citations and arrests by 90% in the past four years. However, Chief Zipperman stressed that having only 340 psychiatric social workers and 594 pupil services and attendance counselors for the entire Los Angeles Unified School District was insufficient to ensure students’ needs are met.

Following Chief Zipperman’s presentation, panelists had the opportunity to question the LASPD Chief and Interim Superintendent in the style of a legislative hearing:

- **City Attorney Feuer opened questioning by asking for the top two or three school safety priorities that LAUSD has presently been unable to achieve.** Chief Zipperman responded that while LAUSD has thought of many priorities, the district must cope with competing priorities that all demand resources. Interim Superintendent Ekchian emphasized that LAUSD would like to prioritize mental health—focusing on the pillars of prevention rather than reaction—but that LAUSD needed greater resources and partnerships with local entities to ensure that students and families receive mental health support. Board Member Melvoin also noted that LAUSD was severely underfunded with half as much funding per-pupil as New York City schools.
- **City Attorney Feuer asked how many out of LAUSD’s schools have a mental health professional on site.** Interim Superintendent Ekchian responded that half of schools have access to mental health professionals with a minimal number of schools that have hired their own on-site personnel.
- **Pastor Kevin Sauls of Holman Methodist Church asked how LAUSD decided to allocate staff on campuses.** Interim Superintendent Ekchian explained that student enrollment had been a determining factor in the past, but now California allocates funding based on the student population, with schools enrolling students with great need (such as foster youth) receiving more funding.
- **Earl Paysinger, USC’s Vice President of Civic Engagement, asked Interim Superintendent Ekchian if she would support legislation that encourages individuals outside of the school context to mandatorily report conditions such as child abuse that may be causing students to act violently.** Interim Superintendent Ekchian said she could not express an opinion without seeing specific language.
- **Gloria Martinez, United Teachers Los Angeles Elementary Vice President, commented that California ranks 46th in per-pupil funding. She urged the Panel and community to**

understand that the decision to hire a mental health professional on campus necessarily requires another position like a nurse or librarian to be cut.

- **Julia Macias, President of the LAUSD Superintendent’s Student Advisory Council, expressed that students have requested more active shooter drills and asked for the best course of action for executing these drills.** Chief Zipperman responded that all schools have safe school plans to react to active shooter situations and that staff are trained by LASPD to respond to these situations. Noting that LASPD did not wish to traumatize students by conducting drills for students, Chief Zipperman said that students should rely on teachers and staff to lead the response to these situations.
- **Juan Flecha, President of the Associated Administrators of Los Angeles, asked Interim Superintendent Ekchian how she listens and integrates opinions from likeminded individuals as well as those in opposition to LAUSD’s policies.** Interim Superintendent Ekchian responded that she believes that respect for voices in the community should be driving LAUSD’s decisionmaking. She emphasized that as long as students are the focus of decisionmaking, the district’s decisions are justifiable. On the topic of school safety, she stated that schools must feel like learning environments, not prisons.
- **Ben Holtzman, the student member of the LAUSD Board, asked if the district had piloted safe passages programs.** Chief Zipperman responded that some parts of the district had a sustained safe passages program, but that LASPD is looking internally to pilot a larger program on safe passages. City Attorney Feuer added that his office also works to implement safe passages programs.
- **Laura Chick, former Los Angeles City Controller, noted that some senior citizens can opt out of paying property tax assessments for schools and suggested that the Panel learn more about that policy and its purpose.**
- **Daniel Barnhart, United Teachers Los Angeles Secondary Vice President, noted that he had visited Castro Middle School and seen counseling taking place in an open room. He asked how LAUSD was setting aside space for counseling.** Interim Superintendent Ekchian responded that private space had been made available at a majority of schools and that she would check Castro as well as other schools to ensure that private space is available.
- **Dr. Marleen Wong, Senior Vice Dean at USC’s Suzanne Dworak-Peck School of Social Work, asked how LAUSD facilitates partnerships with outside organizations and navigates roadblocks to these partnerships.** Interim Superintendent Ekchian responded that there is a local district facilitator that helps manage partnerships. She said that LAUSD reaches out to external stakeholders often for partnerships, and she requested that any barriers to partnership be reported directly to her office.

This concluded the panelists’ questions of the presenters at the first hearing.

After questioning had ended, City Attorney Feuer opened the floor for members of the audience—most of whom were current and former LAUSD students, parents, teachers, and employees—to give concise public comments:

- **Five members of the audience**, two of whom were current LAUSD students, disagreed with the notion that students would be traumatized by active shooter training; audience members

asked for training not only for students on active shooter situations, but also for parents on how to better store guns.

- **Five members of the audience** expressed their support for increased mental health resources and restorative justice programs on-campus. To highlight the need for more mental health resources at schools, one current LAUSD psychiatric social worker stated that she was responsible for 1000 students at two different schools and thus could not be in her schools every day of the week. Overall, commenters emphasized that students need to feel supported by mental health resources at schools rather than alienated by increased security measures.
- **Four members of the audience**—one teacher, one parent, and two students—called for an end to LAUSD’s policy of randomly searching students with handheld metal detector wands. These commenters noted that 96% of school districts do not randomly search students and asserted that wandering disproportionately targets students of color, making them feel unsafe.
- **Four members of the audience**—one teacher, one parent, and two students—expressed that police presence at schools makes students feel less safe rather than safer because students feel criminalized rather than cared for.
- **Two teachers in the audience** urged for school safety to be considered in the context of improving schools generally. These teachers contended that smaller class sizes, competitive wages for teachers, and increased mental health staff would help meaningfully increase school safety.

In addition to their comments and suggestions, a number of audience members thanked the panelists for their time and for bringing attention to the important issue of student safety at LAUSD. The meeting closed with information about topics and dates for the next meetings.