

TO: Panelists, Blue Ribbon Panel on School Safety
FROM: Marissa Roy, Chief Consultant to the Blue Ribbon Panel on School Safety
RE: Minutes from the June 2nd Public Hearing

The sixth Blue Ribbon Panel hearing took place on June 2nd from 2 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. at Sonia Sotomayor Learning Academies. Panel Chair Los Angeles City Attorney Mike Feuer opened the meeting with an overview of the mission of the Blue Ribbon Panel on School Safety and then introduced members of the Panel.

The hearing focused on “Making School Campuses Safer through Preventative and Responsive Safety Procedures.” This hearing featured presentations from LAUSD’s Director of District Operations Dr. Darneika Watson-Davis, security advocate Eric Rosoff, UCLA researchers Amir Whitaker and Jessica Cobb, and a coalition of students from Students Deserve.

LAUSD’s Director of District Operations Dr. Darneika Watson-Davis gave the first presentation to the Panel. Dr. Watson-Davis discussed all of the policies in place at LAUSD schools to increase security and protect students from violence at schools. Dr. Watson-Davis told the Panel that LAUSD requires schools to maintain a single entrance at each school with a visitor sign in policy; other than the entry, the perimeter of schools should be fenced in to prevent unknown persons from entering campus. LAUSD requires all middle and high schools to conduct daily random searches of students with handheld metal detectors to be carried out by trained teachers and staff and documented in a district log. The Los Angeles School Police Department (LASPD) deploys officers to every high school, and officers patrol groups of middle schools. LAUSD requires every school to submit individualized school safety plans to LAUSD, which are reviewed and monitored for compliance by LAUSD. Dr. Watson-Davis noted that it is difficult to measure the deterrence effect of these policies, but that LAUSD believes that these measures make school sites less vulnerable to threats. Dr. Watson-Davis told the Panel that LAUSD needs to continue assessing the vulnerability of schools, expanding the use of cameras in schools, and improving school culture with more mental health support and an emphasis on restorative justice.

Following Dr. Watson-Davis’s presentation, panelists had the opportunity to question her in the style of a legislative hearing:

- **City Attorney Feuer opened questioning on the controversial topic of random searches with handheld metal detectors, asking if random searches take place in all LAUSD high schools.** Dr. Watson-Davis clarified that random searches take place in all LAUSD middle and high schools.
- **City Attorney Feuer noted that students of color had expressed feeling stigmatized by searches they feel are not truly random; City Attorney Feuer asked whether the district had considered standing metal detectors that would search all students:** Dr. Watson-Davis noted that that is a continuing conversation, but standing metal detectors would present an enormous cost to the district.
- **City Attorney Feuer followed up by asking if cost was the main reason that random searches with handheld metal detectors were implemented.** Dr. Watson-Davis noted that there were other reasons for adopting the policy.

- **City Attorney Feuer asked if LAUSD had compared its random search policies to weapons recovery policies in other comparable school districts.** Dr. Watson-Davis responded that LAUSD is looking to other school districts, but had not identified a district to emulate.
- **Former California Supreme Court Justice Carlos Moreno asked how LAUSD's random search policy came about.** Dr. Watson-Davis said that the policy was implemented in 1993 following a school shooting.
- **Justice Moreno asked if there was precedent for the random search policy in 1993.** Dr. Watson-Davis could not speak to that point.
- **Justice Moreno noted that LAUSD's random searches with handheld metal detectors were more intrusive than comparable searches at sports stadiums for example, as students were taken to separate locations for the searches and had to empty their backpacks for teachers and administrators; Justice Moreno asked why LAUSD decided to take these extra measures of intrusiveness.** Dr. Watson-Davis could not speak to that point.
- **Justice Moreno asked how many weapons had actually been seized from random searches.** Dr. Watson-Davis said relatively few weapons had been seized from random searches, in the low single digits.
- **Gloria Martinez, United Teachers Los Angeles Elementary Vice President, asked Dr. Watson-Davis two questions: 1. Noting that schools co-located with charter schools face difficulties maintaining a single point of entry, Ms. Martinez asked how the district works to ensure one point of entry on co-located campuses, and 2. Ms. Martinez asked how the district communicates with students absent during threats to school to notify them when it is safe to return to school.** To the first question, Dr. Watson-Davis said that there has not been a fruitful conversation with charter schools on the topic of single points of entry, but that the district would continue to work with charter schools. To the second question, Dr. Watson-Davis said that LASPD and Student Health and Human Services coordinate to secure campuses and communicate with the student body.
- **Dr. Garen Wintemute, Director of the University of California Firearm Policy Research Center, noted that there is not much research on the use of handheld metal detectors in school, but that available research seems to suggest that the practice makes teachers and administrators feel more secure while students feel less safe; Dr. Wintemute asked if this was the district's understanding as well.** Dr. Watson-Davis stated that students, staff, and parents are divided on their support of this policy. Dr. Watson-Davis said the district is looking to move forward with pilots that would reduce the number of daily random searches.
- **Michael Pinto, an architect and education expert, asked how often the district reevaluate its lock-down drill policy to ensure that students are not traumatized by the drills.** Jill Barnes, answering on behalf of LAUSD, responded that schools have lock-downs every day, often in response to threats in the surrounding neighborhoods. Ms. Barnes noted that one of the challenges of lockdowns are when students outside the classroom get locked out.
- **Mr. Pinto asked if peepholes and lights on doors would help get these students back into classrooms.** Ms. Barnes noted that they could help before a door is locked.

- **City Attorney Feuer noted that there are 400 LASPD officers in the district and asked how these officers are deployed and whether funding is the only barrier to maintaining an officer on every campus.** LASPD Chief Steve Zipperman noted that the number of officers has increased. He also noted that while funding for more officers is an impediment, the placement of officers may also be influenced with schools' individual priorities and policies.
- **City Attorney Feuer asked if the district would maintain a LASPD officer at every school if it had the funds to.** Chief Zipperman said that they would and noted that the department needs to focus on trust-building with students.
- **Chief Zipperman noted with regard to random searches that when the policy was first implemented 1000 weapons had been recovered at LAUSD schools, but that that number has now dropped to 350-400 recoveries per year, suggesting that the policy may have a deterrent effect.**
- **Julia Macias, President of the LAUSD Superintendent's Student Advisory Council, noted that during lockdowns, class usually proceeds as it normally would, and asked how a lockdown would differ during an active shooter situations.** Ms. Barnes noted that most lockdowns occur because of police activity in the neighborhood, which is why class proceeds as usual.
- **Ben Holtzman, the student member of the LAUSD Board, noted that even though the district maintains a single entry policy and random searches, students can still climb fences or throw weapons over the fence.**

Following the panelists' questions, members of the public were invited to comment on the presentation. **One member of the public** noted that the public is under the impression that school police carry out searches when in reality trained administrators are carrying out these searches; this member of the public asked that there be more transparency about the random search policy. **One member of the public** called for an end to the random search policy, noting that other major districts had moved away from the policy. This concluded public comment.

After Dr. Watson-Davis's presentation, Eric Rosoff, a retired police officer and current school security consultant, presented on measures that schools could take to become more secure. Mr. Rosoff noted that schools could make better use of technology to improve student safety. Specifically he suggested the use of closed-circuit television (CCTV) systems in schools as well as the use of card-readers to regulate entry into schools. Additionally Mr. Rosoff emphasized that most schools do not have safe school plans that comply with state and federal law and need to involve key stakeholders like parents when drafting school safety plans.

Following Mr. Rosoff's presentation, panelists had the opportunity to question her in the style of a legislative hearing:

- **City Attorney Feuer asked which technologies Mr. Rosoff would recommend to LAUSD if he was the director of school safety.** Mr. Rosoff suggested CCTV systems in all schools and alarms.
- **City Attorney Feuer asked if there was a model school district that has successfully implemented a CCTV system.** Mr. Rosoff said that there was not such a model.

- **City Attorney Feuer asked how schools could reconcile the benefits of CCTV with the harms it may cause to school culture.** Mr. Rosoff said that stakeholders like parents and students need to have input when a school integrates a CCTV system.
- **Dr. Deborah Prothrow-Stith, Dean at the Charles R. Drew University School of Medicine, asked if Mr. Rosoff thought CCTV systems would have made a difference in the Parkland school shooting.** Mr. Rosoff noted that a CCTV system might have helped the response in Parkland, but in that situation, preventative measures would have been more important.
- **Dr. Prothrow-Stith noted that as a matter of resource allocations preventative measures may be a better investment.** Mr. Rosoff noted that many systems failed in Parkland.
- **In the spirit of disclosure, Dr. Wintemute asked Mr. Rosoff what services his commercial enterprise provides.** Mr. Rosoff responded that he consults with schools to develop safe school plans at no cost and wants to start a nonprofit to provide such services for free to LAUSD schools.

Following the panelists' questions, members of the public were invited to comment on the presentation. **Two members of the public** expressed support for maintaining a police presence on campus. **One member of the public** called for an end to the random search policy, arguing that it has little deterrent effect. **One member of the public** noted that parents and community members need to be more involved in decisionmaking affecting student safety. This concluded public comment.

After Mr. Rosoff's presentation, Amir Whitaker and Dr. Jessica Cobb of UCLA presented their research on LAUSD's random search policy. Mr. Whitaker began by noting that Columbine had CCTV and metal detectors and Parkland had police officers on campus; yet, he stressed that research reflects that hardening measures have little to no impact on school safety and rather create a false impression of safety. Dr. Cobb stated that rather than increasing safety, hardening sends two messages to students: 1. that adults suspect the students like criminals, and 2. that adults are not capable of keeping students safe. Specifically on LAUSD's random search policy, Dr. Cobb noted that a review of the search logs at all LAUSD schools over two school years showed that only eighty-six weapons had been found in 105,000 student searches. Dr. Cobb said that instead of recovering weapons, 61% of items recovered through random searches were school supplies. Dr. Cobb stated that such searches wasted 39,000 instructional hours annually and cost the district \$1.12 million. Mr. Whitaker said that investments in mental health services and other community-building measures would actually make schools safer without criminalizing students.

Following Mr. Whitaker's and Dr. Cobb's presentation, panelists had the opportunity to question them in the style of a legislative hearing:

- **City Attorney Feuer opened questioning by noting that after the shooting in Sao Castro, his Neighborhood School Safety Team went to the school and heard uniform support from parents for random searches; City Attorney Feuer asked whether and to what extent this parent view should inform a decision about the random search policy.** Mr. Whitaker said that while parents' views are important, the student voice is as

well. He stated that some students are feeling pushed out of schools by this policy. Dr. Cobb added that since the random search policy is not effective, a false sense of safety does not do anyone any good.

- **Laura Chick, former Los Angeles City Controller, asked for more details on how weapons are recovered through means other than random searches.** Mr. Whitaker said that most weapons are recovered when students trust adults at school and volunteer helpful information.
- **Earl Paysinger, USC's Vice President of Civic Engagement, asked if Mr. Whitaker and Dr. Cobb had been able to measure the policy's deterrent effect.** Mr. Whitaker said that quantifying deterrence can be difficult, but that anecdotally they had seen instances where students brought weapons to school despite the random search policy.
- **City Attorney Feuer returned to Ms. Chick's question and asked how weapons are recovered by means other than random searches.** Chief Zipperman stated that students report weapons on campus when they have a relationship with adults on campus. Sometimes LASPD finds weapons randomly or when a teacher has reasonable suspicion that a student is carrying a weapon. Dr. Cobb noted that there are inconsistent numbers. ISTAR reports show a low number of guns found from random searches while LASPD reports higher numbers.
- **Dr. Prothrow-Stith emphasized what the most important factor in evaluating the random search policy is how the policy serves and effects students.**
- **Dr. Wintemute noted that there has not been evidence of an absence of effectiveness but rather an absence of evidence on hardening at all. However, Dr. Wintemute noted that what evidence there is shows a tension between hardening measures and community building which could ultimately effect students' willingness to report conduct on campus.** Mr. Whitaker agreed that the collateral effects of hardening measures are harmful.
- **City Attorney Feuer also noted that because the federal government has restricted research in the area of school safety, there likely will not be more research on this topic.**
- **Ms. Macias wanted to clarify what means other than random searches were used to recover weapons at school.** Dr. Cobb said that she could not speak to how these weapons were recovered, but could simply say they were not recovered through random searches.
- **Mr. Holtzman asked whether it was the researcher's position that the random search policy does not deter students from bringing weapons to campus.** Dr. Cobb says the data suggests to her a lack of a deterring force and that is substantiated by anecdotal evidence.
- **Mr. Holtzman followed up by asking Chief Zipperman for more details on his statement that when the policy was first implemented thousands of weapons were being recovered annually at LAUSD and now only 300 weapons are being recovered annually.** Chief Zipperman noted that these 300 weapons are the total number, not the number recovered through random searches. Dr. Cobb noted that in recent years weapon recovery numbers have been increasing.
- **Mr. Holtzman asked whether the researcher's estimate that LAUSD had lost over \$1.12 million because of the random search policy was accurate since the number was calculated based on teachers' and administrators' time, which would be a cost**

to the district regardless of the random search policy. Mr. Whitaker responded that time is money and that time should be put toward teaching students.

- **Ms. Martinez noted that Los Angeles today is a different city than Los Angeles in the 1990s when this random search policy was first introduced. Ms. Martinez noted that when she talks to parents now, they say that they want schools to be communities.**
- **Chief Zipperman asked how the 24,000 hours of lost instructional time was calculated.** Mr. Whitaker said that they allocated 10 minutes of lost instructional time per search based on teacher accounts.
- **Chief Zipperman asked how much instructional time has been lost from student walk-outs.** Dr. Cobb responded that she would not consider students exercising their First Amendment rights as lost instructional time.

Following the panelists' questions, members of the public were invited to comment on the presentation. **Two members of the public** supported putting an end to the random search policy in favor of measures that more positively contribute to school climate. **Two members of the public** advocated for the random search policy as a layer of protection for students. **One member of the public** suggested that LAUSD work with businesses to improve school safety. This concluded public comment.

After Mr. Whitaker and Dr. Cobb's presentation, students from the coalition Students Deserve presented their perspective on LAUSD's random search policy. The students started by describing the Students Deserve movement: the group has sent 15,000 fliers to students, held two events, and spoken with every member of the LAUSD school board. The students then noted that there is a disconnect between the intent of the random search policy and its impact; while the policy may have been intended to make students safer, it has actually contributed to a culture of fear. The students said that searches were dehumanizing and caused personal anxiety, breaking down trust between students and adults on campus. Additionally, the students noted that students of color are disproportionately searched. The students said that the policy does not act as a deterrent, but rather breaks down trust necessary for effective reporting of weapons on campus. A parent testified that community schools would provide safer and more effective learning environments for students. The students called for an end to the random search policy.

Following the presentation from Students Deserve, panelists had the opportunity to question the group in the style of a legislative hearing:

- **Dr. Wintemute asked what other measures the Panel could consider to make schools safer and increase student trust in adults on campus.** The students recommended fostering community schools with more mental health resources, electives for students, and safe passages programs.
- **Rocio Ramirez, a parent leader and PTA vice president, thanked the students for being present.**
- **Mr. PAYSINGER asked what role parents should play in the debate over the random search policy.** The students noted that parents are more in favor of random searches than parents, but that parents perspectives have changed when they have seen their children upset and understand that the random search policy creates a false sense of security.

- **Dr. Prothrow-Stith asked for the coalition's thoughts on the Local Control Funding Formula.** The parent advocate stated that more LCFF money should be spent on mental health services.
- **Krystal Torres-Covarrubias, Education Policy Manager at the Los Angeles LGBT Center, noted that it is difficult to get parents involved with schools without a full community schools model.** The students agreed and noted that it is also hard for parents to engage with LAUSD when school board meetings are held during work hours.
- **Antonia Hernandez, President and CEO of the California Community Foundation, noted that she had done a report on parent involvement at LAUSD which showed that teachers and administrators need to value parents' contribution and make time for it.**
- **Chief Zipperman thanked Students Deserve for their presentation and encouraged them to have a follow-up discussion.**

Following the panelists' questions, members of the public were invited to give general public comment. **One member of the public** expressed support for measures to increase parent involvement. **One member of the public** said that it is a good policy to check backpacks for drugs and alcohol. **One member of the public** noted that schools need higher per pupil funding. This concluded general public comment. The meeting closed with information about the next day's panel hearing.