



## Safety First: Leveraging Partnerships and Advocacy to Create Safe Routes and Passages to School for All LA Unified Students

*Author, Board Member Kelly Gonez*

*(For Board action October 6, 2020)*

Whereas, Political protests in the wake of George Floyd's murder have pushed Los Angeles to reimagine its long-term, systemic approach to public safety and commit to transformative change in the name of racial equity, justice, and fairness for every Angeleno;

Whereas, Residents have mobilized en masse to push for greater investments in communities in need and a proactive, equitable, and community-based approach to public safety;

Whereas, Schools are the heart of the neighborhoods they serve, and, as such, should be places where students and families can commute to and from safely without fear of being exposed to violence or injured in a traffic collision;

Whereas, In our most under-resourced communities, students are more likely to rely on public transportation, walking, and biking, and are most affected by sidewalks in disrepair, traffic collisions, and exposure to violence;

Whereas, The District is responsible for the safety and security of students while on campus, but must rely on the City of Los Angeles, neighboring cities with the District's boundaries, and Los Angeles County to ensure student safety in their neighborhoods and along their routes to and from school;

Whereas, According to the 2018-2019 School Experience Survey, fewer than two thirds of students across grade levels said they felt safe in the neighborhood around their school, indicating a need for increased safety measures outside our schools;

Whereas, Thousands of District students and families walk to and from school on a daily basis rely on public transportation, walking, and biking to and from school where they are at risk of violence or traffic injury, and many of them must travel through areas identified by the Los Angeles Department of Transportation (LADOT) as High Injury Networks, where nearly two thirds of all deaths and severe injuries involving pedestrians occur;

Whereas, Vehicle collisions are the leading cause of death for children aged 5 to 14 years (Vision Zero Action Plan, 11/2019). Approximately 2,940 students are transported by the District because the pedestrian route they take from home to school and back is potentially hazardous. This ranges from students who must cross freeway off ramps, railroad tracks, or other potentially hazardous conditions as determined by the Board of Education;

Whereas, the City of Los Angeles currently allows for 100 LADOT infrastructure improvements (including sidewalk repairs, traffic signals, etc.) on behalf of District schools, which does not adequately meet the route-related safety needs of our more than one thousand school sites;



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Whereas, the physical landscape has a direct effect on community safety, and these route-related safety issues heighten and compound the level of trauma our students already endure as a result of other exposures (including violence, intimidation, harassment, human trafficking, drugs, and gang activity) on their commute to and from school;

Whereas, Thirteen campuses in the District, many of them located in low-income neighborhoods, saw at least 50 homicides within a one-mile radius in 2019 (Los Angeles Times, 2/27/2019);

Whereas, Many district students have reported being accosted, threatened or harassed by strangers on their commute to school and in parks or public areas near their schools. This is particularly true for female students, who are most often the victims of sexual harassment;

Whereas, Decades of research suggest that the effects of exposure to violence on students are wide-ranging, and can result in anxiety, depression, anger, absenteeism, and an inability to concentrate in class (Chronic School Absenteeism and the Role of Adverse Childhood Experiences, Academic Pediatrics, 2017). As such, efforts to provide safer routes for our students has been supported and endorsed by City of Los Angeles through initiatives such as National Walk to School Day, Vision Zero, City of Los Angeles Mayor’s Office of Gang Reduction & Youth Development (GRYD), and Safe Passages;

Whereas, the City of Los Angeles has expanded Gang reduction and Youth development programs by more than 50% and established the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) Bureau to better address these issues in our communities;

Whereas the City of Los Angeles has redirected funds from the Los Angeles Police Department, committing \$250 million towards youth jobs, health initiatives, and “peace centers” to heal trauma experienced in these communities;

Whereas, The Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors placed its “Reimagine LA County” measure on the November ballot that would require 10% of locally generated, unrestricted county money – about \$400 million – be spent on housing, mental health programs, jail diversion, employment opportunities, and social services.

Whereas, No student should fear for their safety or well-being as they make their way to school. Schools are the heart of our communities, all children and families should feel safe as they travel to and from school; Be it therefore,

Resolved, That the Governing Board of the Los Angeles Unified School District calls on the County and City of Los Angeles, as they reimagine public safety, to include and prioritize efforts to ensure the safety of our students and families in the areas surrounding schools; and be it further,



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Resolved, That the Superintendent work with the Office of Governmental Relations to advocate with the County of Los Angeles, City of Los Angeles, and other municipalities that fall within District boundaries to invest more in gang reduction, youth development, mental health, and other preventative programs, and to address fully the safety and infrastructure issues students encounter on their daily commute to schools; and be it further,

Resolved, That the Superintendent work in partnership with the relevant departments of the County of Los Angeles, City of Los Angeles, the City Attorney's Neighborhood School Safety Program, and community-based organizations at schools with a high rate of student trauma to explore the feasibility of a pilot program that would:

- Effectively coordinate safety efforts between governmental entities community organizations, and schools in order to create a strong community presence on designated streets or areas as students commute to and from school;
- Address the neighborhood violence and trauma that students encounter as they travel to and from school by committing more City resources and funding to Safe Passages programs in coordination with the Mayor of Los Angeles' GRYD office;
- Strengthen youth programming and safety investments outside school hours at local parks near schools, where students report incidents of violence or harassment;
- Expand gang-prevention programs funded by our municipal partners and create more opportunities for district schools to partner with community organizations for gang-prevention programs;
- Expand the City Attorney's Neighborhood School Safety Program's agreement with the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power for the continued installation and/or upgrades of street lights and exterior lighting on and around district campuses; and be it further,

Resolved, That the Board calls on the City of Los Angeles to strengthen its commitment to ensuring Safe Routes to school, and that it work in partnership with the Office of the Superintendent and its relevant departments to:

- Increase the number of LAUSD's allotted LADOT infrastructure improvements to more adequately reflect the over 1000 school sites our students attend and meet the community's safety, traffic, stormwater, and infrastructure needs;
- Prioritize areas near schools for increased services such as street sweeping, sidewalk repairs, street light maintenance, bulky item pickup, and to address illegal dumping;
- Increase the number of crossing guards to reflect the high number of students and families who walk to school;



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- Prioritize outreach and services to homeless encampments in areas directly surrounding school sites and designated Safe Routes to School so students aren't forced to take longer, potentially more hazardous routes to school;
- Continue collaboration with the relevant District staff regarding Vision Zero Efforts, Safe Routes, and Metro transit planning around schools in order to account for the District's feedback on school needs, and be if finally;

Resolved, That the Superintendent report back to the Board in 90 180 days with the feasibility of a Safe Passages pilot program and the plans for advocacy with the City and County around safety for students near our schools.