

Los Angeles expands school policing in wake of Newtown shooting

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In the aftermath of the mass shooting last month at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) has launched a program to deploy 600 armed police patrols in elementary and middle schools. Los Angeles Unified School District already has armed police permanently stationed at public high schools.

Nationwide, the response of the political establishment has been to increase state powers, including expanding policing, while obscuring the real roots of the Newtown tragedy. The Obama administration has unveiled a broad “gun control” proposal that expands government databases and includes increased funding for armed police at schools.

Cities and localities are following suit. In response to questions about “Operation Embrace,” LAPD Chief Charlie Beck said, “This isn’t a cure-all but it will help keep schools safer.”

Increasing police patrols at schools will not halt violence, as it does nothing to address the root causes of such school shootings—official indifference to ever worsening social conditions, the lack of any means for improving conditions within this political setup and the embrace and glorification of mass murder, militarism and violence by the US government, from drone killings to police repression within the US itself.

One aim of the police build-up in the schools is to accustom children from a very early age to the constant presence of police and an atmosphere of fear. “The mind-set that lockdown drills are going to scare children is nonsense,” scoffed LAPD officer Stephanie Martin in a comment to the DailyBreeze.com.

Every mass shooting, beginning with Columbine, has been seized upon to increase police presence in the schools. In fact, while incidents of mass killings have become more frequent in recent years, the general level

of school violence has remained stable or even decreased since 1985, according to several studies.

The claim that armed police patrols and routine lockdown drills do not have an impact on children is patently false. The American Psychological Association and the Center for Disease Control and Prevention have found that extreme discipline in schools, including arrests, increase grade retentions, school dropouts and future involvement in the juvenile and criminal justice systems.

According to a 2009 study by the American Civil Liberties Union, “Consistent with what has been found in national assessments, training for these school officers is not mandatory, and if given at all, does not include training in adolescent psychology, how to gain respect of youth and manage behavior in a school setting, or how to work with students with disabilities or mental health issues.”

While police generally deal with infractions as criminal matters, teachers and other school personnel are trained in child adolescent development and psychology, positive behavioral interventions and supports, conflict resolution, or peer mediation. They also understand the unique behaviors of students with intellectual disabilities, or other special needs.

The Dailybreeze.com article describes the Manhattan Beach Unified School District, also in the Los Angeles area, which regularly practices lockdown drills. These unplanned drills are blasted via the schools’ loudspeakers that a lockdown is under way and children are instructed to go to the nearest classroom.

An elementary school teacher in Long Beach said, “When the Newtown incident happened, all of us were absolutely horrified. And the fact that it happened to children similar in age to my own students was especially upsetting. But the solution is not to put

armed police in elementary and middle schools.

“In all this hysteria, nobody has been talking about where all this violence is coming from. I’ve been teaching for 14 years, and I have noticed a marked drop in the social conditions of my students and their families. There’s been the huge impact of foreclosures and then nonstop budget cuts to social programs, especially to public education. This has been going on for a long time, whether it’s a Democratic or Republican in office. And all people hear about is war and more wars. American society has become a very brutal place.”

The teacher went on to explain, “This year the father of one of my students is homeless and living out of his pickup truck. Some of my poorest students have parents who are working, but at low-wage jobs such as the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) at Los Angeles International Airport. One of the schools in our district is designated for homeless children.

“Last year the district closed a relatively small elementary school, which had over 300 students. And our school absorbed them, and now we have 1,100 students from kindergarten to fifth grade. Four years ago, I had 20 students. Now I have 30 kids in my class while our district has laid off over 800 teachers.”

The militarization of schools over the past several decades has resulted in the phenomenon known as the School to Prison Pipeline. Schools are employing policies and practices of “zero tolerance” that push young people out of school and into the juvenile and criminal justice system. The influx of police in schools has been one of the main contributors to the growing number of children funneled into the pipeline.



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