



Struggle-La-Lucha.org

LA students support school workers' strike, oppose armed police

written by Scott Scheffer
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Jailynn Butler-Thomas of the organization ‘Students Deserve’ speaks at their press conference in support of the Black Students Achievement Program.

Jailynn Butler-Thomas is a student at Dorsey High School in Los Angeles. She spoke with Struggle-La Lucha about support for the recent Los Angeles Unified Public School District (LAUSD) strike and opposition to armed police in public schools.

Struggle-La Lucha: In a news article about the LAUSD strike, your organization, “Students Deserve,” was written about because of the support that you carried out. But there was also a reference to your organization’s ongoing struggle against armed police being stationed in schools. I’d like to start with you telling our readers

a little about that.

Jailynn Butler-Thomas: There's so much backlash that myself and my peers and those who are fighting for police-free schools have to deal with. I think that a big part of it is the difference between restorative and punitive justice.

Punitive justice is like breaking something down. Punishment, punishment, punishment.

Not helping, like fixing or healing, or just building up rather than breakdown.

We're young, we're children, and we're going to have conflict, we're going to make mistakes. That's bound to happen.

Putting police in our schools to harass us and criminalize us, beat it out of us, or pepper spray us, or harass it out of us is not the solution. Police presence on campus is more harmful.

We're not saying that there doesn't need to be somebody there for safety reasons. We're just saying that police that are armed with any kind of weapon are not safe for students. Because of how they treat students, anything can happen any time. A lot of the times, police don't solve the problem, they only escalate it.

In Uvalde, Texas, the police didn't go inside. They stood outside and waited. It got to the point where parents are running inside to their children. I think that that's like a prime example that police don't help.

In a situation at my school in 2019, a fight broke out, and police were just pepper spraying anyone in the area. Just students walking to class. The nurse's office was overflowing with students getting pepper sprayed — students who were just walking into class and didn't do anything wrong.

Something similar happened recently at Garfield high school. Police aren't helping the situation. A bunch of cops that are gonna hurt children and take away from their learning experience and turn schools into this prison-like situation isn't the answer. That's gonna take away from our education.

I think the real answer for us is restorative justice. We're not saying the schools don't need anyone there for these situations. But why not pull people from the community, why not have people there for safe passage after school? Why not have a better solution that doesn't involve students getting criminalized?

Police on campus is an uncomfortable situation for people of color because of how they're being treated. We don't feel safe. You're not gonna want to come, you're not gonna be engaged. You're gonna be distracted, and that is going to take away from your education.

SLL: Your support for the strike was so vigorous. It got the attention of the media that students supported the strike. How did that come about? Do your co-students come from pro-union families?

JBT: So, I think there are many factors why students stood behind teachers and staff. Yes, some people's families have a history of union struggles. But also, we see these faces every day.

These are the people welcoming us, feeding us, and taking care of us, making sure that we're learning, making sure that we're safe, asking how our day is going at school.

I also think a huge factor, the main factor that rallies students behind UTLA and Local 99, is that they're struggling, and we're struggling, and that unites us. Our fight to make the Black Students Achievement Program (BSAP) permanent and to gain mental health support and support for immigrant students is something that's

driving us.

This isn't anything new - we've been fighting for these things for a very long time.

We conducted a survey that was historic. It showed that 87% of students are benefiting from the BSAP program. Black students are benefiting from it.

It also showed that 49% of Black students don't have enough mental health support, as well as showing that 45% of Black students' schools don't have enough resources in general, which isn't fair and it's not okay.

We have to sit in front of the school board's new superintendent and literally beg for things that we deserve and are necessities and are literally the bare minimum for a good educational experience, while the superintendent, who gets paid more than the [U.S.] president, sits on \$5 billion in reserve.

He can't give us the money that we were promised. It doesn't make sense, and it doesn't make sense that teachers and these essential workers were getting paid below poverty level but have to negotiate in the first place.

It doesn't make sense the superintendent is acting as if we are asking for so much, but we're asking for what we deserve. He gets paid to take care of teachers, staff, and students, and we shouldn't have to fight for this. That is what unites us all.

This strike has shown that when teachers, students, and parents come together, they can really shut it down. I think that the school district and superintendent are scared about that because it was beautiful and it made an impact. And we're not gonna stop until we get these things. We're all struggling, and that's what brings us together in solidarity.

