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Depends on What the Meaning of 'Expelled' Is

*by Terrence P. Jeffrey,
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In all the years that liberal politicians have been using Locke High School in South Central Los Angeles as a photo opportunity to show Americans they really care about poor kids in public schools, one key indicator has remained sky-high.

It's the school crime rate.

When Vice President Al Gore visited Locke before the 1996 election, he told the students: "This election is about you. Your future. Your prospects."

That school year, according to data published by the Los Angeles Unified School District Police, crimes connected to Locke (meaning they were committed against faculty or students at the school, adjacent to the school, at a school event, or in transit to or from the school) included 1 sex offense, 7 robberies, 14 weapons possessions, 30 property crimes, 24 batteries, and 7 assaults with a deadly weapon.

Tipper Gore visited Locke in April 1999 to promote a school jazz program.

That school year, the crimes connected to Locke included 2 sex offenses, 30 robberies, 17 weapons possessions, 50 property crimes, 39 batteries, and 27 assaults with a deadly weapon.

President Clinton visited Locke on a much touted summer "poverty" tour before the 1999-2000 school year. Democratic California Gov. Gray Davis joined him.

That school year, the crimes connected to Locke included 3 sex offenses, 13 robberies, 6 weapons possessions, 48 property crimes, 40 batteries, and 11 assaults with a deadly weapon.

In 2000-2001 there were 13 sex offenses connected to Locke, 43 robberies, 80 property crimes, 2 weapons possessions, 57 batteries, and 19 assaults with a deadly weapon. In 2001-2002, there was 1 sex offense, 10 robberies, 31 property crimes, 19 batteries, and 3 assaults with a deadly weapon.

Statistics are not yet available for 2002-2003, but in April, the Los Angeles *Times* reported that a "melee" broke out during the lunch period at Locke. It involved as many as 300 students "with teenagers allegedly swinging pipes and bats at one another," reported the paper. School officials believe the report was exaggerated.

Still, you might have assumed that Locke was precisely the type of place Congress and President Bush had in mind for designation as a "persistently dangerous school" under the No Child Left Behind Act. This law, signed in 2002, required every state taking federal education money to write a rule for determining such schools. It required school districts to give all students enrolled in a "persistently dangerous school" the option of transferring to a safe public school in the same district.

The California Department of Education released its rule last month. Locke did not qualify as "persistently dangerous." Nor did any other California school.

How could this be?

The rule says that to be listed as "persistently dangerous," a California school must expel more than 1 percent of its students for any of nine types of crimes in each of three consecutive years.

Since 1998, enrollment at Locke has ranged from 2,264 to 3,048 students. In that time, the school never referred more than 20 students in one year to district administrators for expulsion. In 2001-2002, it referred only 1.

Locke faces no risk at all of becoming a "persistently dangerous school."

Why are its students so infrequently expelled? It depends on what the meaning of "expelled" is. Problem students in the Los Angeles Unified School District are sometimes given "opportunity transfers" to other public schools. They are sometimes sent to a "continuation school." If they are old enough, they can be sent to an "adult" school. Sometimes they even go to jail. But they are rarely "expelled."

California school authorities concocted a Clintonian definition of "persistently dangerous school." It will protect the state's federal education funding while keeping poor kids trapped in places like Locke. And California may not be alone: Officials in Arkansas, Georgia, Florida and Illinois have determined there are no "persistently dangerous schools" in those states, either.

Whose interests are being served here? Well, liberal politicians can still do photo ops and poverty tours at Locke and similar schools.

And who is victimized? In a few weeks, hundreds of 13-year-old girls will be forced to begin their freshman year in the battle zone at Locke. My bet is there won't be a single member of the Clinton, Gore or Davis families among them.

[Terence Jeffrey](#) is Editor of [Human Events](#).

Not Persistently Dangerous? Crimes connected the Locke High School

	School Year					
	96-97	97-98	98-99	99-00	00-01	01-02
Assault With a Deadly Weapon	7	14	27	11	19	3
Battery	24	37	39	40	57	19
Property Crimes	30	65	50	48	80	31
Possessio of Weapons	14	15	17	6	2	0
Robbery	7	20	30	13	43	10
Sex Offenses	1	1	2	3	13	1
Expulsion Referrals	NA	12	20	8	2	1

Sources: *Los Angeles Unified School District Policy* (www.laspd.com) and *Los Angeles Unified School District* (www.lausd.com)