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**LAUSD Canceling Summer School:
Do We REALLY Want To Go There?
Between The Lines
By Dr. Anthony Asadullah Samad, PhD
BlackCommentator.com Columnist**

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The Superintendent of the second largest school district in the United States, Ray Cortines, recently announced that the Los Angeles Unified School District will be canceling summer school as a cost cutting remedy for the district's \$400 million dollar budget shortfall.

Who thought of this bright idea? Can they (the School Board) really be serious? The city of Los Angeles has enough problems controlling summer youth violence when summer school is in. Now the 700,000 pupil district, with the 57% graduation rate—that annually sends a quarter of its student population to summer school now wants to create another situation, nearly 200,000 latch-key children home for the summer. Do we really want to go there?

Have we finally gotten to the point where our children have become unwilling pawns in the state's (and city's) budget games? It appears so. Cortines and School Board President, Monica Garcia, can't twist the union to get teachers to take cuts, so the leverage play is to close the schools over the summer and let the children just "hang out." Hang out to dry is more like it.

This crummy play tops Governor Schwrazenegger's threat to release (unleash) prisoners throughout the state if his ballot initiatives didn't pass. Even in the aftermath, it's interesting that the nation's largest incarcerator STILL isn't proposing that kind of cuts for prisons that it is proposing for education.

But suppose that scenario does play out, and he does release—even what he considers to be low level offenders—out of prisons, most of whom will not be able to find work as the state's unemployment rate is almost twice the national average and the city of Los Angeles' rate is 50% higher than that. Combine that with nearly a half-million middle and high school youth roaming the streets. The "threat level" is incalculable. Factor in

the sexual predator concerns (and it really is a concern, go to www.meganslaw.com to find the fifteen sexual predators in a location near you), and you realize that schools are the safest place and the most supervised space our children can be in during the middle of the day. The time where children are most apt to get into trouble is 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. in the afternoon. It is also the most violent time. But it is just a fraction of the kind of endangerment unsupervised youth encounter in their own homes, and we know the home life for many LAUSD ain't exactly the best and most will not be able to afford child care while their children are out of school. The district's position is essentially, "That's not our problem."

Well, it is our problem. It's all of our problem. The whole society has a responsibility to do whatever it can to insure the safety of children and senior citizens. We can't continue to throw everybody away in this state. As the nation's biggest jailer, homeless capital, foster care leader and foreclosure leader, California's "throw 'em away" mantra has now started to set its sights on the children. Can't educate 'em, send them home. Not quite the solution we need right now. Is closing summer schools worth the danger exposure to our children?

In the world's most affluent nation, there should never be a reason to close public schools (as dysfunctional and non-productive as they are). They serve a vital stop-gap in the balancing act between social order and anarchy. The state, city and the district borrows everything else on credit, why not run up the tap for the sake of the children? The anti-taxation movement (Prop. 13) that undermined our schools and municipal infrastructure is to blame here as California can no longer survive on an antiquated tax formula three decades old when the state population has doubled and will double again in the next two decades. Closing schools at any time is not the answer.

And closing schools during summer months when children (and parents) are trying to supplement their child's learning in ways that weren't (or couldn't) be addressed in the regular school year undermines the last remnants of quality learning in an already compromised public education system. This is not the precedent to set. It's a terrible short term fix to a huge long term problem.

I don't know who came up with the idea of closing public schools for the summer, but maybe they should go home for the summer, lock themselves up in the house and tell us how that benefited the budget crisis in two months. Just as they wouldn't "go there," why should our children be forced to. None of us really want to go there, because there are no winners, and our children can't afford to lose any more than they already are. Somebody needs to advocate for them.

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BlackCommentator.com Columnist, Dr. Anthony Asadullah Samad, is a national columnist, managing director of the [Urban Issues Forum](#) and author of [Saving The Race: Empowerment Through Wisdom](#). His Website is AnthonySamad.com. Click [here](#) to contact Dr. Samad.

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