

# Militarism in Schools: A Student's Perspective

— Nancy Cruz

As students, we are constantly being targeted by the military, whether it's through military recruiters at our schools, calls at our homes or even through our educational curriculum.

Toward the end of our high school years, we find ourselves deciding whether or not to pursue higher education or to choose what seems to be “the easy way out” (military, in some cases). Sometimes raised by immigrants or by a single parent, we struggle with the reality that we do not all receive equal access to resources to prepare us for college. What should be our right is only a privilege for a few.

In most urban schools like mine, students dream of being lawyers, probation officers, teachers and psychologists; but counselors, who are overwhelmed or uncaring, neglect to provide the information we need to satisfy our dreams. Instead, counselors are pushing students to take classes like JROTC to fill up spaces.

The military knows our vulnerabilities and seeks us everywhere we go — at home, the malls and at school — and by every communication channel — mail, phone calls, e-mail and television. At my school we have a career center. Its function should be to provide information about various careers, but I have never seen anybody except military recruiters come to speak to us students. We have the Air Force, Navy and Army coming week after week. We do not need the Marines coming because they are already here. Our principal took it upon herself to establish a Marine JROTC at our school this past year. It is a daily reminder that there is a need for soldiers.

We are constantly bombarded. For example:

- The school organized a “carnival” to reward students who raised their state test scores. Navy recruiters were placed at the entrance, giving out t-shirts in exchange for our personal information.
- Several times during the year military recruiters come and organize competitions in our quad.
- In promoting the ASVAB (military entrance exam,) a teacher decided to excuse a test grade if we took it.
- Students are being told that there is no room in other classes and that the ONLY option is JROTC.
- The last week of school recruiters came several times.

This year, when we learned that other San Diego schools in wealthier neighborhoods were not exposed to the military at all, we had had enough. With academic programs also being removed due to de facto discrimination, we knew we had to do something.

Perhaps the most difficult task of all has been educating my peers about militarization of our schools.

I have been organizing since the beginning of my sophomore year in high school around multiple social justice issues. But as I began confronting militarism at Mission Bay High School, I was alone. I had the knowledge but not the numbers. I realized that the best way to spread word about what was happening was to dialogue with my peers. I shared what I knew and some of them became interested. Then one great teacher supported this movement along with me. We reached out to parents because we knew that if anybody had power, it was they. Parents were surprised to hear about the JROTC shooting ranges and all of the subtle exposure of their children to the military.

As students, we took it upon ourselves to do what was right and let our principal, administration, parents, school board and nation know what we think. We have petitioned, protested, walked out, leafleted, spoken to the school board, been interviewed on TV and radio, networked with other schools such as Lincoln High, and helped found the Education Not Arms Coalition.

Now, as the year comes to a close, we are struggling more than ever to make our voices heard. Our board of education has ignored us or done little to acknowledge our problems. Because of the board's inaction and our administration's determination to keep things the way they are, the issues remain urgent.

I am graduating and will begin attending UCLA in the fall. The information and education about militarization that my peers and I received this year cannot be taken from us. I know that we will continue to struggle for justice and will continue to make a difference.

*This article is from the July 2008 issue of Draft NOTICES, newsletter of the Committee Opposed to Militarism and the Draft (<http://www.comdsd.org/>)*



Nancy Cruz in front of Army recruiting station during walkout of Mission Bay High School students on March 26, 2008.