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English 111-97

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Persuasive Essay

The debate about whether school officials have the right to search students’ belongings has become a controversial issue. Many debate that their right of privacy is being violated. However, what about the safety of an individual? Does a person’s privacy truly matter when an individual is in a potential dangerous situation? School officials should have the ability to search any individual’s belongings on a school campus with reasonable cause when suspecting that the individual may have weapons or drugs in order to assure safety, have orderly and controlled environments, and promote the negativity of drugs and violence for students.

In an effort to create and maintain safe environments, school officials and administrators have increasingly resorted to school searches for drugs and weapons. The Fourth Amendment from the United States Constitution gives students the right to be free from unreasonable searches. However, this right is limited under reasonable suspicion. According to the case of New Jersey vs. T.L.O (1985), “a warrantless search by a school official does not violate the Fourth Amendment as long as the official has reasonable grounds to believe that a student possesses evidence of illegal activity.”(Roberts)

One of the priorities of a school is to ensure a safe and secure environment for its students in addition to providing excellent academics. Conducting searches at school would ensure safety on campus. These searches would help prevent any harmful incidents from occurring. There is a likely a probability that a student can come on a school campus with a weapon, which could include a gun, knife or anything else that could potentially harm someone, and have malicious intent to use the particular weapon to harm another student or school administrator.

In 2007, Seung-hui Cho, a student at [Virginia Polytechnic Institute](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virginia_Tech) and State University, brought a gun on campus killing 33 people and wounded 23 others. This was the deadliest college shooting to date. In 2012, a horrible incident at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newton, Connecticut occurred where six staff members and twenty students under the age of seven were shot and killed (Chapman). All of these shooting could have been prevented had the individuals been searched beforehand. Although these tragic incidents happen rarely, they could potentially occur and it’s essential to be prepared if they do and prevent tragic incidents, such as the ones at Virginia Tech and Sandy Hook Elementary, from happening. In addition, it will allow students and teachers to be in an environment where they feel safe and confident.

Conducting searches at school will also help set an orderly and controlled environment on campus. In addition to the use of weapons, student drug use and violence is also a huge problem in many schools. According to a 2008 American Teacher Survey, nine percent of teachers feel that violence impedes the learning abilities of about 25 percent of their students. In addition, twenty seven percent of teachers feel that drugs and violent student behaviors prevents them from accurately teaching their information to students (Boggess).

However, not only are teachers concerned about the school environment, many students themselves are as well. Students who don’t feel secure at school have difficulty focusing on their schoolwork and are more likely to stay at home rather than to deal with the rough situations at school. Many studies have shown that schools with higher rates of violence have lower test scores, reduced graduation rates, and fewer students who attend college after high school (Boggess). In addition to teachers and students, parents give full trusts to the school’s administrators to make sure that they keep their child safe at school. These students go to school to learn while teacher try to do their job to make a living. Having officials on campus will help create a more orderly environment for students and teachers because they will feel safe that officials are looking out for probable individuals who could disrupt the process of teaching. Plus, students will be aware that there will be zero tolerance for any violence and drug use on campus which could decrease students from using any drugs or carrying weapons.

“By the 1990s, school problems were defined as weapons possession, drug and alcohol abuse, gang activity, truancy, and violent assaults against students and teachers.”(Flannery) By allowing searches around schools, the amount of students bringing or owning a weapon and taking or selling drugs could decrease drastically, including violence. “The Monitoring the Future study showed that in 2001 fifteen percent of 8th graders, thirty three percent of 10th graders, and thirty seven percent of 12th graders had used marijuana in the past year, while ten percent, seventeen percent, and twenty percent, respectively, had used an illicit drug other than marijuana in the same period.”(Yamaguchi)  Also, according to the Indicators of School Crime and Safety study thirty to thirty two percent of students reported that another individual offered, sold, or gave them an illegal drug while on school property (Yamaguchi).

If a student knows that he or she could get caught with a weapon or drugs, then there is a light chance that he or she actually brings any of those items to school. Understanding that weapons and drugs are both dangerous and unacceptable, will not only decrease the possibility of having possession of them but also the student will know that it is a crime and inappropriate. These students will understand that safety comes first, for themselves and others.

There has been an increase of schools focusing on student searches to ensure a safe school environment. “Many parents believe that a school search is not legally correct on the basis of their perception of a student's right to privacy. Some complaints by parents will originate from not understanding the differences between a school's thresholds for conducting a search and the conditions necessary for law; enforcement officials to conduct searches.”(Brunner) There have been numerous of cases where a school wins the case on student searches for drugs because the courts believe that schools need to create a safe environment. It’s understandable when debating about a student’s right of privacy. However, it is not a student’s right to carry a weapon or to be in possession of drugs at school. Therefore if an officer has probable cause that an individual is carrying any weapons or drugs, wouldn’t it be appropriate for him or her to search the individual?

The officer is not conducting the search to humiliate or offend a particular student. Their job is to make sure the school is safe, not to promote danger. In addition, if the student felt that they were under no circumstance given reason to promote suspicion and be searched, they have a right to say and legally fight their circumstance. Before entering any court building for a court hearing or for any other reason, the first thing you see is officers waiting to search you and your belongings. They do it to make sure that the court is safe for everyone in it, just like at school. The whole purposes of the searches are to promote and ensure safety. Any weapon can be as dangerous as anyone can make it be.

Conducting reasonable searches in school should be seen as a necessity rather than a suggestion or an inconvenience. School officials should have the right to conduct a search on an individual with probable cause to help a school be more secure, be more orderly and controlled and teach their students the negativity of drug and weapon use. It is critical that safety is provided on a school ground. This will help student and adults feel secure and comfortable while on school grounds.

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