

El Salvador cracks down on discipline in schools

25th August 2025



El Salvador is cracking down on school discipline. President Nayib Bukele has appointed a former army captain, Karla Trigueros, as education minister. She has started inspecting schools wearing army fatigues. Ms Trigueros is also a physician and was

head of the country's vaccination logistics during the coronavirus pandemic. One of her first edicts was to require all school principals to become role models. School heads will be required to greet students as they come through the school gates each morning. They will also scrutinize pupils' haircuts and uniforms. Trigueros warned schools that: "Failure to comply with these provisions...will be considered a serious breach of administrative responsibility."

The main focus of El Salvador's new education initiative is on appearance and conduct. In particular, boys are required to have closely-cropped, military-style haircuts, while all students must wear tidy uniforms and greet all teachers respectfully. There has been mixed reaction to the new policy. A leading teachers' union called it a "regrettable militarization" of schools. It was concerned that the country was veering back to the days of military dictatorship. It said: "We are concerned that the already [endemic] abuses of power against students will increase." However, many parents are supportive of the new rules. One said: "That's how you straighten children out from a young age."

Sources: [apnews.com](https://www.apnews.com) / [dw.com](https://www.dw.com) / [nbcnews.com](https://www.nbcnews.com)

Writing

Discipline in all schools should be very strict. Discuss.

Chat

Talk about these words from the article.

El Salvador / school discipline / army captain / education minister / logistics / haircut / focus / initiative / uniforms / teachers / militarization / students / abuses / parents

True / False

- 1) El Salvador's education minister used to be an army captain. T / F
- 2) El Salvador's education minister visits schools dressed in army uniform. T / F
- 3) El Salvador's education minister wants all students to be models. T / F
- 4) School principals must check students' haircuts every morning. T / F
- 5) Schoolboys and girls in El Salvador must have very short hair. T / F
- 6) A teachers' union is fully behind El Salvador's new education policy. T / F
- 7) The teachers' union is concerned schools are being militarized. T / F
- 8) A parent said it is not the job of schools to straighten students out. T / F

Synonym Match

(The words in **bold** are from the news article.)

- | | |
|----------------------------|---------------------|
| 1. cracking down on | a. planning |
| 2. former | b. misuses |
| 3. logistics | c. violation |
| 4. greet | d. unfortunate |
| 5. breach | e. strategy |
| 6. initiative | f. one-time |
| 7. cropped | g. in favour |
| 8. regrettable | h. trimmed |
| 9. abuses | i. getting tough on |
| 10. supportive | j. welcome |

Discussion – Student A

- a) What do you think about what you read?
- b) How important is discipline in schools?
- c) What difference does it make if students have closely-cropped hair?
- d) To what degree are the new rules a move towards militarization?
- e) What new disciplinary rules would you introduce in your country?
- f) How good are you at self-discipline?
- g) What do you think children think about school discipline?
- h) What questions would you like to ask a school principal?

Phrase Match

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. wearing army | a. of power |
| 2. head of the country's vaccination | b. with these provisions |
| 3. They will also scrutinize | c. of schools |
| 4. Failure to comply | d. fatigues |
| 5. a serious | e. children out |
| 6. closely-cropped, military- | f. pupils' haircuts |
| 7. a regrettable militarization | g. style haircuts |
| 8. veering back to the days | h. breach |
| 9. abuses | i. logistics |
| 10. That's how you straighten | j. of military dictatorship |

Discussion – Student B

- What was school discipline like when you were a student?
- Are army captains well suited to instill discipline in schoolchildren?
- What message does an education secretary wearing fatigues send?
- How can school principals be good role models?
- What rules should there be on haircuts and uniforms?
- What should happen to principals whose schools fail to comply?
- Are you a good disciplinarian?
- What rules do you not like to follow?

Spelling

- taodinppe a former army captain
- wearing army siufateg
- the country's vaccination cotsisiql
- One of her first cdetis
- They will also treuczsiin pupils' haircuts
- Failure to comply with these visonospir
- El Salvador's new education tiaineviit
- There has been mixed nceoriat
- the country was eenriqv back
- the days of military pcothstrdiai
- eemincd abuses of power
- parents are prpotvusei of the new rules

Answers – Synonym Match

1. i	2. f	3. a	4. j	5. c
6. e	7. h	8. d	9. b	10. g

Comprehension Questions

Listen to / read the news article. Answer these questions.
(Answers are on p. 27 of the 27-page PDF.)

1.	What was the education minister's former role in the army?
2.	What did the education minister wear when she visited schools?
3.	What does the education minister want school principals to become?
4.	What will principals check as they greet students at the school gates?
5.	What will failure to follow the new rules be a serious breach of?
6.	What kind of haircut are schoolboys required to have?
7.	What kind of reaction has there been to the new rules on discipline?
8.	Who likened the rules to a "regrettable militarization of schools"?
9.	What is a union worried the country is veering back towards?
10.	What did a parent say the rules will do to children?

Speaking – School Rules

Rank these with your partner. Put the most important school rules at the top. Change partners often and share your rankings.

- | | |
|------------------------|--------------------|
| • Arrive on time | • Wear the uniform |
| • Do your homework | • No running |
| • Keep your hair short | • Be polite |
| • Participate in class | • No bullying |

Answers – True False

1 T	2 T	3 F	4 T	5 F	6 F	7 T	8 F
-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----

Answers to Phrase Match and Spelling are in the text.