

Action Plan for Holistic Safety and Wellness for the Peralta Community Colleges and District

Submitted by *Black Minds Matter at Peralta*

(a volunteer group of concerned students, faculty, staff and community leaders.

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This plan has been endorsed by the Student Senate at Laney College (ASLC), the Peralta District Academic Senate, and the Faculty Senates at Laney, Merritt and College of Alameda.

The Peralta Board of Trustees voted unanimously on June 23, 2020, to terminate the \$4 million contract with the Alameda County Sheriff's Office as of December 31, 2020. This was done in the interest of student, employee and community safety and social and racial justice for all.

The defunding of the Sheriffs will free up significant budgetary resources that should be used to invest in social and material conditions that provide holistic safety and wellness for students and staff on our Campuses and at the District Office. (There are additional resources from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security ([CARES](#)) Act to provide emergency grants to students with unforeseen emergency expenses related to the disruption of campus operations due to COVID-19. Eligible expenses included food, housing, course materials, technology, health care and childcare. In addition, the California Community Colleges just received a \$100 million grant from the Jay Pritzker Foundation to provide scholarships and emergency financial aid to students facing financial hardships.)

Developing the new safety plan is an especially urgent concern, and educators across the four colleges stand ready to work with the new community safety contractor(s), the District and College Administrators, and all shared governance bodies to ensure that Peralta fulfills this remarkable commitment to the community we serve.

This action plan outlines a multi-tiered approach to keep our community safe using strategies and resources that promote wellness and prevent and de-escalate unnecessary harm in our community.

An overview of safety measures:

- More Campus-Based Mental Health Counselors for Group and Individual Therapy
- Utilize Counselors as Public Safety Supporters
- Expand Training and Diversification of Student-Community Safety Aids
- Restorative Justice Training, Policies, and Staff
- Mental-Health-First-Aid Training for Faculty, Staff, and Students
- Student Services Care Teams/Behavioral Intervention Teams
- Support Students' Basic Needs
- Case Managers or Social Workers to Support Needy Students

This action plan should be developed and implemented with input from students, staff and faculty through the shared governance process at all four Peralta Colleges.

Action Plan for Holistic Safety and Wellness

- 1. Hire and announce the community-safety contractor(s) immediately** so they can begin planning the new PCCD safety and security plan, in collaboration with District and College experts and representatives.
- 2. Engage participatory governance committees and campus expertise** An ad hoc or existing District-level participatory governance committee operating within the [Planning and Budgeting Integration Model \(PBIM\)](#) is needed to work with the new community safety contractor(s) and the Colleges to develop effective campus-specific safety and security plans. Campus-level security decisions should flow through the Colleges' Health and Safety Committees and have local input for them to be successful. Personnel who work closest to past and current security concerns, including Facilities Managers, Discipline Officers, Deans and their staff who respond to campus conflicts and conduct issues, must be included. At the Colleges, the makeup of Health & Safety Committees needs to be broadened or prescribed to include mental health counselors, Wellness Center Directors, Associated Students representatives, and staff from departments across the campus.
- 3. Provide Adequate Mental Health Services (Hire 5-11 more full-time therapists)** Conflict on campus is sometimes related to stress and coping challenges that could be reduced by adequate access to mental health counseling and services. Based on professional standards¹, student mental health services are distressfully understaffed in the Peralta Colleges, which harms our students. The [International Association of Counseling Services \(IACS\)](#) recommends at least one full-time equivalent professional mental health counselor for every 1,000 to 1,500 students. Peralta has about one-third of that, only one FTE therapist (including trainees) for 3,090 students. In the 2019-20 academic year, the Peralta Colleges had over 17,000 FTES. Currently we have approximately 5 ½ FTE therapists (most of whom are part-time faculty or student trainees). To serve student needs, our 4 colleges should have a total of between 11-17 full time mental health counselors who provide services locally and free of charge. Peralta urgently needs to hire 5-11 new mental health counselors spread across the colleges. At least 80% of these therapists should be of color, representative of the students, in order to provide culturally responsive and trauma-informed treatment.
- 4. Utilize Counselors as Public Safety Supporters** if they are interested. Counseling departments at the four Colleges have existing duties and structures in place that could be augmented to provide additional responsive and preventive improvements to students' well-being. This may include: student crisis intervention, de-escalation, consultation with instructors to address student performance and instructors' relationships with students, class presentations, workshops, videos, and student advocacy should be explored to determine

¹ The [International Association of Counseling Services](#) IACS recommends one F.T.E. professional staff member (excluding trainees) to every 1,000 to 1,500 students. When an institution exceeds the recommended ratio, they risk the students' academic success, higher wait times, and the inability to treat more severe psychological issues. The [average ratio nationally](#) is 1 therapist (either professional or trainee) for every 1,459 students.

‘best practices’ and/or required engagement. There is an essential need for each college’s Counseling Department to frame these services from a public safety lens that honors the needs of each respective college.

5. **Training and Diversification of Student-Community Safety Aids.** Student aides can be an important part of the new safety plan. They should be provided enhanced training on de-escalation, mediation, mental-health-first-aid, anti-oppression, and restorative justice. Increased outreach to the student community in hiring would promote expansion of the diversity of the Student-Community Safety Aid teams and actively promote teams that are culturally knowledgeable of the local community.
6. **Restorative Justice training for all students, staff and faculty**
Implement Restorative Justice training for all students, staff and faculty who want it. Restorative Justice is a set of principles, a philosophy, focused on mending broken relationships to create a better future². The focus is on understanding and taking accountability for harm, non-punitive responses to harm, with the goal of healing and transformation. Restorative Justice training³ may include harm circles, mediation, or conferencing to respond to disciplinary issues in a restorative manner. This work would include pre-emptive training for developing support structures before the transition from armed law enforcement, including discussion about the impact calling armed law enforcement personnel has on our students. District-wide training⁴ designed to create a campus-wide culture at each College that fosters open dialogue and supportive places for students to express their concerns could also include reaching out to community members who have utilized the ASCO in difficult situations in their classrooms, offices and other work spaces to present problematic situations and invite collaboration to identify alternative methods for conflict resolution.
7. **Mental Health First Aid Training Certificate for students, staff and faculty** who want it. Mental Health First Aid is an evidence-based public education and prevention tool that helps the public identify, understand, and respond to signs of mental illnesses and substance use disorders. Similar to traditional First Aid and CPR, Mental Health First Aid is help provided to a person developing a mental health problem or experiencing a crisis until professional treatment is obtained or the crisis resolves. Participants take the 8-hour course to certify as Mental Health First Aiders and learn a 5-step action plan encompassing the skills, resources and knowledge to help an individual in crisis. Courses are currently offered at BCC. During COVID-19, the courses are offered virtually. <https://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org>.
8. **Student Services Care Teams/Behavioral Intervention Teams** - Support these teams on all campuses Creating awareness, educating staff on resources, and providing training about behavioral concerns, enhanced support to current protocols and personnel. Build and

² “What is Restorative Justice?” <http://rjoyoakland.org/what-is-rj/>

³ We recommend working with local groups that already have relationships with educational environments. (ex: RJOY - Restorative Justice for Oakland Youth, The Ahimsa Collective).

⁴ Ongoing and continuous work becomes a critical part of the success of these programs. Therefore, if we adopt a “train the trainer” model, we can concretize the policy as a more institutional aspect of our campus cultures.

expand existing programs along with outreach and advertisement so people know there are alternatives to calling for armed law enforcement officers.

9. Budgeting to Support Students' Basic needs -- Student housing, temporary housing/hotel vouchers, free nutritional food, Chromebooks and high-speed internet access, as well as assistance with healthcare, clothing, hygiene and the other services mentioned above must be considered as part of a real community safety fabric that supports successful education throughout Peralta.

The move beyond the ACSO brings an opportunity for reprioritization of our budgetary funds, investing in social and material conditions that promote real security for students. Homelessness, food insecurity, trauma, and other mental health issues all hold space within our campus. Economists and Sociologists have used terms like "Housing insecurity" and "Food insecurity" for well over a decade, and with good reason: These conditions present an over-arching threat to people's very existence, and impact every other aspect of their lives until or unless the insecure conditions are restored to a healthy, sustainable state. As an institution, we have the resources necessary to meet every student's basic needs. No Peralta students should go hungry or without shelter attending an institution intended to serve them, and that benefits from their attendance.

The case for affordable and safe student housing for Peralta students has never been more clear. Oakland and surrounding cities have been plagued by the violence of gentrification causing many Peralta students born and raised in the East Bay to navigate displacement. Some of our students travel to and from school from as far as Stockton, Ca. The Peralta District must have the political will to make bold decisions and create the relationships necessary to begin plans for student housing. The Peralta District cannot be complacent with the issue of homelessness that has only been exacerbated by the economic crisis caused by COVID-19. We cannot expect our students to truly show up to class in safety and health if they do not know where they will lay their heads to rest at night.

During remote learning due to COVID-19, student technology needs, including laptops, high-speed Internet/hot spots, and basic computer training, must be met. This means these resources must be broadly publicized and made easily accessible to students.

10. Case managers or social workers to connect struggling students with basic needs and services. Case managers provide referrals and assistance with obtaining available resources for students concerning needed services such as academic support, housing, food, and healthcare, including substance abuse and mental health therapists, etc. Provide follow up and follow through with support and longer term relationships for students who need it. Can also conduct outreach, check-ins, helping with on-campus crises, and weekly groups or workshops, etc. Consider providing 1-full-time licensed social worker/case manager for each learning community and/or support service (e.g., CAYFES, DSPS, ROC, Puente, Umoja, Athletics, EOPS, The Lavender Project, Student Discipline Office, etc.).