

OFFICE OF THE BOARD OF EDUCATION

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**OAKLAND UNIFIED
SCHOOL DISTRICT**

Community Schools, Thriving Students

To: President Aimee Eng, OUSD Board of Education
Vice President Jody London, OUSD Board of Education
Superintendent Kyla Johnson-Trammell

From: Student Director Yota Omo-Sowho, OUSD Board of Education
Director Jumoke Hinton Hodge, OUSD Board of Education

RE: Retaining Restorative Justice, Foster Care Services and Office of Equity - APISA programs

Date: February 19, 2019

Thank you for the opportunity to consider our appeal to retain vitally important services and programs provided for our most vulnerable students in OUSD. These programs represent the spirit of our District's vision - thriving students that are prepared for college, career and community success- and the OUSD mission that believes academic achievement is a result of serving the whole child. We are asking the BOE to fund the Restorative Justice Office, Foster Care Services, and the Office of Equity for one more year while strategies are developed to find alternative funding sources to sustain this critical work for our students who are low-income, English Language learners, and deeply impacted by trauma. We ask the Board to reduce the reserve to 2.5% to save these programs, to reduce disruption for students, and to allow for one more year to plan and develop effective strategies which will lead to long term sustainability for these essential services.

We understand that as District Board members representing our constituencies, we are responsible for uplifting the District's priorities which include quality community schools, students first and equity. These priorities support LCAP and successful students outcomes. It is without a doubt that the programs that serve foster students must be preserved and done in an equitable way and with adequate staffing. LCAP requires us to invest funds in foster student populations. We must fulfill this obligation and we cannot do that by pulling the support, thereby replicating the decades of lack of support and capacity to serve these students. Here is an example which OUSD should focus on: an equitable approach -- providing the necessary supports to ensure the educational experience of foster students are elevated. We know that an increase in supports has resulted in greater and more positive outcomes for foster students in just this past two years. Therefore, we must protect our foster students because they deserve it.

In holding students first at the center of our work we support the collective process in which All City Council Student Union identified budget priority areas which include Student Leadership (RJ, AAMA, APISA, LSA), Teacher Recruitment, Retention and Relationships, Mental Health and Wellness (which includes foster care services) and College & Career support programs.

We know what these vitally important programs can do to support student success; we cannot afford to take our eyes away from this vulnerable population. Additionally, we know that investment in students' social and emotional well being improves attendance, student satisfaction with schools and development of leadership skills. More students will have ownership over their educational experience. Investments like Restorative Justice and APISA programs that support the cultural and racial identity of students are not options for

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negotiation. Teachers in OUSD consistently say that RJ supports the environment for learning in their classroom and do not want to see it rendered ineffective or eliminated.

One of our District priorities is Organizational Resiliency, which means that we are a District that practices Equity in our decision making and how we allocate resources. We have worked to shift practices which support better teacher practice and recognize areas that we need to strengthen.

We have expanded the Office of Equity over the last three years to support Asian Pacific Islander students, including struggling Southeast Asian, Pacific Islander and Middle Eastern student populations. In 19 months, 14 APISA programs have meaningfully engaged with almost one third of our 6,000 API students. OUSD demonstrated courage and great insight to see that we need to support a population by name that is often regulated as the “model” minority population - and, as a result, few resources or attention is provided. And yet our own data shows the Pacific Island population has some of the lowest rates of college attendance and academic success. However, over the last year the District made this equitable investment and the results were phenomenal, with a 20% increase in graduation rate for Pacific Islanders, and raised the attention and support to the community. The APISA program is another shining example of when we focus our resources on underserved populations there is support and there are high quality results. This program is in its nascent stage and it would be detrimental to under-resource it as we are developing a strategy and have enlisted tremendous community support. Therefore, we need to protect the Office of Equity because our students deserve it. These programs are the manifestation of implementing Board policies that Equity, LCAP, and Full Service Community schools.

Restorative justice programs at OUSD schools focus on reconciliation and restoration instead of a punitive approach to discipline. RJ directly interrupts the schools to prison pipeline. it is important to address the underlying institutional racism that is at the core of the education system and the institutionalization of RJ programming is necessary to combat it. Every year there are over 350 peer leaders who are trained in RJ and hold over 1000 circles in all three tiers. This work is done by the RJ Facilitators in partnership with ACC and there needs to be a sustainable plan to carry on the hard work of hundreds of students and RJ facilitators.

OUSD is a pioneer in restorative justice, implementing the most extensive model of successful integration of RJ practices in a school district in the United States. As violence is the primary reason for suspensions in OUSD, eliminating RJ program support will set us back more than a decade, expanding the school to prison pipeline, and undermine our proven strategy for transforming conflict and eliminating racial disproportionality. Schools that have lost RJ facilitators have seen a rise in suspensions of students. At Oakland High, when there was an RJ Facilitator on campus, suspensions dropped, from 68 in 15-16 SY to 58 in 16-17 SY to 45 in 17-18 SY. This year, without an RJ Facilitator, suspensions have increased to 68 (see www.ousddata.org). Maintaining district match funding is critical because, without it, schools cannot afford to support RJ staff and programming. Cost savings on fewer suspensions are significant as well as the increased safety at our schools.

Please consider our alternative to the proposed cuts to the RJ, Office of Equity, and Foster Care programs. We believe that the following conditions are necessary to accompany this request. We acknowledge the difficulty

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in aligning resources to programs and our values. We do not want to see the District throw away over a decade of intentions and effort to educate children holistically.

To that end, we must also acknowledge that we know we are currently negotiating with the OEA to ensure that employees receive a living wage. We want to better understand how supplemental dollars are being used that could be going to these impacted services. We also understand there is a great need to save money but we propose, at this time that we lower the OUSD reserve by approximately 2.5 million, which is approximately a .5% reduction in the reserve.

Our goal would then be to focus on fundraising from a variety of sources to supplement the existing OUSD budget and reserve, and ultimately, to bring in additional revenues so that the OUSD budget will increase overall. We believe at this moment that widening the net of stakeholders can help contribute to short term and long term solutions. We must maximize the impact of these programs and the investment the District and Board have made to date.

We ask for a 1-year continuation of funding at the current levels and we propose that the BOE and OUSD take the following steps:

1. Organize a convening to collectively redesign a Sustainability Plan and Fund Development plan for the threatened programs.
2. Research sustainable model for our targeted equity strategies
3. Take steps to weave restorative practices into the daily life of our district, in professional development for all staff,
4. Develop a comprehensive Fundraising Plan which includes: a. Short, Middle, and Long term goals; b. Evaluation of the pros and cons of foundation dollars; and c. specific funding strategies for programs that support restorative justice practices, foster care youth, Southeast Asian and Pacific Islander students, and other valuable programs.
5. Evaluate the need for programs through an Equity lens, ensuring that student populations which have historically lacked adequate support are prioritized. i.e., Foster Youth and APISA. (Please Note: This is not intended to pit specific groups against each other, but only level the playing field and interrupt disproportionate issues that have not been addressed.)
6. Create an Outside-Inside Task Force which will include membership from all stakeholders, including OUSD administration, teachers, students, parents, community members and other relevant participants.

We believe all of these programs represent our values as a school district, community and city. We believe we must see this as an investment in the next generation. Some of us will leave our roles in OUSD in the next couple of years and we are seeking this remedy for students and leaders that will follow us.