

June 10, 2020

Dear Board of Directors, Oakland Unified School District:

We write to support the call from the Black Organizing Project and other community groups to eliminate the Oakland Unified School District Police Department. The police murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor—only the most recent examples of a centuries-old pattern of state-sanctioned killing—serve to remove any ambiguity and place a moral obligation on our district to act.

Our first responsibility to our young people is to create the safety and security where learning can thrive. The historic over-policing of communities of color, the ubiquitous images of ongoing brutality, and the unambiguous voices of our youth make clear that the presence of police undermines our efforts at establishing safety. Time and again, courageous students have told us that police make them less safe—“period”—and we cannot ignore those whom we would serve. While some officers may have contributed positively over the years, the work of a few good apples does not erase the cumulative and very real threat police represent to communities of color. In seeking a safety for, rather than a safety from, our young people, we must do honor to their voices and lived experiences, otherwise we replicate the very systems of oppression we seek to reform.

Indeed, in a time of recession and never-ending budget cuts, to continue to utilize scarce resources to fund our own police department undermines the very mission of our district and our schools. We seek to provide young people with access and opportunity; the OUSD Police Department offers neither, and its continued existence is funded at the expense of programs far better suited to attending to the academic, social, and health-related needs of our young people. To be sure, defunding is only part of a larger solution. We must understand this work not as a mere budget reduction, but as a reallocation and reinvestment in the potential of our students, and commit to funding the social workers, restorative justice facilitators, and mental health professionals our schools need to fully serve and educate young people.

Some will say that the OUSD Police Department is necessary because it is used. When school leaders are given only a hammer, they will treat every problem like a nail. Greater investments in school-based support staff will both reduce the need, and the desire, to utilize police as a response to disruption or disorder. Moreover, our city already has a police department to call upon in legitimate circumstances. If, as has been asserted elsewhere, OPD is unable to provide adequate service to our schools, then this represents a further call for action and change. We should not subsidize these perceived shortcomings at the expense of our school communities.

Allyship requires commitment. Values, like dreams, must be upheld lest they be deferred. We urge the Board to join school districts in Minneapolis and Portland to defund our police force; and in its place, reinvest in student- and community-centered safety measures. The time is way past now.

Very sincerely,

Kilian Betlach, Principal, Elmhurst United Middle School
Marcos Garcia, Principal, United For Success Academy

Cliff Hong, Principal, Roosevelt Middle School
Jonathan Mayer, Principal, Claremont Middle School
Tierre Mesa, Principal, Urban Promise Academy
Amapola Obrera, Principal, Frick United Academy of Language
Neha Ummat, Principal, West Oakland Middle School
Alykhan Boolani, Co-Principal, Life Academy
Aryn Bowman, Co-Principal, Life Academy
Theresa Lozach, Principal, Burbank Preschool and Diagnostic Center
Ofelia Mendoza, CDC Site Administrator
Matin Abdel-Qawi, Principal, Oakland High School
Rosemary Rivera, Co-Principal, Fremont High
Jorge Wahner, Vice Principal, Fremont High
Nidya Baez, Vice Principal, Fremont High
Alesia Eutsler, Early Learning Principal (CDC Site Administrator)
Peter Van Tassel, Principal, Cleveland Elementary
Amy Carozza, Principal, Coliseum College Prep Academy
Amy Boyle, Assistant Principal, Coliseum College Prep Academy
Fabiana Ahumada, Assistant Principal, Coliseum College Prep Academy
Dwayne Bartholomew, Principal, Ralph J. Bunche Academy
Casey Beckner, Principal, Grass Valley Elementary School
Ricardo Jara, Assistant Principal, Skyline High School
Michelle Deiro, Principal, Met West High School
Zarina Ahmad, Principal, Piedmont Avenue Elementary School
Bryan Bassette, Assistant Principal Elmhurst United Middle School
Emma Batten-Bowman, Rudsdale Newcomer High School
Viet-Ly Gonzalez, Assistant Principal, Elmhurst United Middle School
Faris Jabbar, Principal, La Escuelita TK-8
Logan Manning, Principal, MetWest High School
Michelle Espino, Assistant Principal Castlemont High School
Emily Rasmussen, Assistant Principal, Elmhurst United Middle School
Karen Schreiner, Principal, Think College Now! Elementary School
Bri Zika, Melrose Leadership Academy
Linda Flynn, Principal, Bella Vista Elementary School
Veronica Garcia Montejano, Oakland International High School
Julissa Lambert-Yank, Principal, ACORN- Woodland Elementary
Joseph Blasher, Assistant Principal, Urban Promise Academy
Rachel Quinn, Principal, Glenview Elementary School
Jessica Wright-Davis, West Oakland Middle School
Anita Summerlin, Markham Elementary
Eugene A. Stovall IV, Principal at Fruitvale Elementary
Eleanor Alderman, Principal at ICS
Ettienne Godfrey, Assistant Principal, Roosevelt Middle School
Joao Solomon, Assistant Principal, Roosevelt Middle School