



March 10, 2021

Superintendent David Vierra
AVUHSD Governing Board Members
44811 North Sierra Highway
Lancaster, CA 93534

To: dvierra@avhsd.org

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alparrell0928@gmail.com; drvruffinavboard@gmail.com

Re: Reimagining Policing in Schools in the Antelope Valley 2021

Dear Superintendent David Vierra and Governing Board Members,

We are a coalition of community organizations and leaders from the Antelope Valley calling for the end of law enforcement violence and racism in our communities. We launched our campaign, #CanceltheContractAV last week, which you can read about in the Antelope Valley Press and the Los Angeles Times.¹

As part of this campaign, we are calling on the Antelope Valley Union High School District (AVUHSD) to **not renew the contract with the L.A. County Sheriff's Department (LASD)** to police our Antelope Valley schools. Furthermore, we are calling for AVUHSD to lead a transparent and inclusive process with students, parents, teachers, and community stakeholders to reimagine and reinvest how the more than \$1.6 million dollars that is annually spent on these services could be spent to best support our local students.

While it is good to see off-campus suspensions have gone down from 2013 to 2019², it is very concerning that while African American make up only about 18% of the student population, they continue to make up the majority of these suspensions. Likewise, it is good to see expulsions

¹ Raymond Garcia, *Coalition Goal: End pacts with LASD*, Antelope Valley Press (Mar. 5, 2021), https://www.avpress.com/news/coalition-goal-end-pacts-with-lasd/article_dd2f9cc2-7d65-11eb-acb1-ff27f6e196b7.htm; Liela Miller, *Sheriff's Department Reform in Antelope Valley has Lagged for Years, Court Monitors Say*, L.A. Times (Feb. 25, 2021), <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2021-02-25/la-me-antelope-valley-settlement-agreement-progress>.

² Antelope Valley Union High School District, *Suspension and Expulsion Overview* April 11, 2019 (2019) (on file with the coalition).



dropping dramatically, and while African American students are no longer the leading group being expelled, they are still overrepresented among expelled students given their overall representation in the student body of 18%.

According to the Education Development Center, “the presence of police in schools is linked to higher rates of arrest for low-level infractions, higher suspension rates, and lower rates of graduation and college enrollment.”³ Since the movement for Black Lives rose to prominence in the wake of the George Floyd murder last year, **14 school districts** across the nation have ended their contracts with law enforcement. And many other school districts around the country are reconsidering their relationship with local police departments. The evidence shows that law enforcement officers in schools can cause more harm than safety, especially to the Black and Brown students, students with disabilities, LGBTQ+ students, poor and low-income students, and to students living at the intersections of these demographics.⁴ At Antelope Valley High School alone, almost 90% of the student population is that of Black and Brown students, and over 88% are socioeconomically disadvantaged.⁵

Last summer, AVUHSD alumni and teachers shared their harrowing experiences and that of school peers interacting with LASD while on campus.⁶ Many shared witnessing humiliating searches and arrests of students on campus that disrupted and traumatized their educational experiences. One person shared how their experience seeing a Black student who was also in foster care be subjected to an invasive and humiliating on school campus search by LASD that turned up nothing. During this incident, another LASD sheriff made racist remarks to her about the student. Another shared how LASD drew guns on her and another female student for allegedly stealing candy from a local store. AVUHSD must do better.

³ Meghan Caven and Ivy Jones Turner, *Beyond #PoliceFreeSchools: Reimagining Safe, Equitable Schools*, Education Development Center, (2020), <https://www.edc.org/blog/beyond-policefreeschools-reimagining-safe-equitable-schools>.

⁴ Institute for Policy Studies, *Reimagining School Safety: New Institute for Policy Studies Report Shows How Much It Costs Communities to Have Cops in Schools* (2020) <https://www.commondreams.org/newswire/2020/09/09/reimagining-school-safety-new-institute-policy-studies-report-shows-how-much-it?amp>.

⁵ Antelope Valley Union High School District, *Antelope Valley High School, 2020 SARC Reports* (2021) https://resources.finalsite.net/images/v1611677794/avdistrictorg/rnl5yc4zymfe4dtoeqmy/2020_SARC_Antelope_Valley_High_School_20210107.pdf.

⁶ NoCopsAtAVSchools, *Real Stories About Real Campus Cops*, Medium (July 1, 2020), <https://medium.com/@nocopsatavschools/real-stories-about-real-campus-cops-b122811ee9ab>.



As we mentioned, thanks to the national movement for racial justice, many school districts in cities like Portland, Peoria, Denver, Oakland, Madison and even our large neighbor to the south, LAUSD, have decided to terminate their relationship with local police departments as calls to “defund,” or better “reallocate,” these funds gained momentum across the nation.⁷ Our community is calling for the end of the regular presence of law enforcement in our schools. We also would like to suggest the idea of creating safe schools through positive safety discipline measures; like employing and hiring more school trained staff to ensure safe and positive school climates, such as community intervention workers, peace builders, behavior interventions, counselors, and any support staff that can and actually prevent safety concerns and conflicts.⁸ Our coalition has provided you with an easy resolution to adopt as a district, it is as follows **listed in Appendix A.**

The experiences of our students with LASD are not happening in a vacuum, but in the broader context of racist and unconstitutional policing that LASD has been providing in Antelope Valley for decades. For instance, a 2013 investigation by the U.S. Department of Justice (D.O.J.) found that Lancaster, Palmdale, and LASD targeted Black people with discriminatory enforcement of the Section 8 housing program and that LASD deputies engaged in a pattern of misconduct against Black and Latino residents.⁹ Antelope Valley residents have also been the victims of the excessive and deadly force in the community¹⁰ and even in LASD jails.¹¹ It has also been

⁷ Research for Action, Reimagining School Safety Without School Police (2020) <https://8rri53pm0cs22jk3vvqna1ub-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/RFA-policeinschools-3-final.pdf>.

⁸ See, e.g., Counselors Not Cops, Dignity In Schools <https://dignityinschools.org/take-action/counselors-not-cops/> (last visited Mar. 9, 2021).

⁹ Findings Letter from Thomas E. Perez, Assistant Att’y Gen., U.S. Dep’t of Justice, to Lee Baca, Los Angeles County Sheriff (June 28, 2013), <https://justice.gov/file/414701/download>.

¹⁰ Sebastian Rotella, *Undue Force, Racism Charged in Shootings by Deputies*, L.A. Times (May 21, 1989), <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1989-05-21-me-950-story.html>; M. Dilworth, *Families, Activists Unite to Demand Accountability in Deputy-involved Shootings*, Antelope Valley Times (Feb. 8, 2012), <https://theavtimes.com/2012/02/08/families-activists-unite-to-demand-accountability-in-deputy-involved-shootings/>; M. Dilworth, *Logan, Cobian Families File Excessive-force Claims Against Sheriff’s Department*, Antelope Valley Times (Mar. 8, 2012), <https://theavtimes.com/2012/03/08/logan-cobian-families-file-excessive-force-claims-against-sheriffs-department/>; Erika Aguilar, *Lancaster Couple Shot 15 Times by Sheriff’s Deputies Awarded \$4 Million*, KPPC (Aug. 14, 2013), <https://www.scpr.org/blogs/news/2013/08/14/14506/lancaster-couple-shot-15-times-by-sheriff-s-deputi/>; *Lawsuit Filed in Deputy-involved Shooting that Killed Palmdale Teen*, Antelope Valley Times (Dec. 20, 2017), <https://theavtimes.com/2017/12/20/lawsuit-filed-in-deputy-involved-shooting-that-killed-palmdale-teen/>.

¹¹ Joe Domanick *How California Failed Kevin Evans*, L.A. Times (Aug. 21, 2001), <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2001-aug-26-tm-38522-story.html>.



documented that LASD deputy gangs have a presence in the Antelope Valley sheriffs' stations.¹² In 2015, much of this resulted in the US D.O.J. settling a lawsuit against both cities and LASD for their Section 8 housing discrimination and constitutional rights violations against Black and Latino residents.¹³

And yet, despite more than five years of Settlement Agreement oversight by the D.O.J. Monitoring Team, LASD and L.A. County continue to be out of compliance on the vast majority of indicators, including unlawful and racist stops, searches, backseat detentions, use of force, handling of complaints, and positive community engagement.¹⁴ Today, racial profiling of Black and Latinos residents persists as they continue to be stopped, searched and detained at higher rates than white residents. We see this same approach in our schools, with higher rates of suspensions and expulsions for Black and Latino students as compared to their populations.

In summary, we are asking that you stand with us on the right side of history in 2021. Operate with us in truth, and racially heal our nation and our community. We must end this vicious cycle of the school to prison pipeline especially within our Antelope Valley Community. Today, our task is simple:

- 1. Do Not RENEW or SIGN a contract with the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department for the protection, safety, and building of our youth and young adults.**

We respectfully request an opportunity to meet with your team to further discuss our concerns. Please contact us through Lynne Lyman (lynnelyman@gmail.com) and Ben Stolz (ben@bowersconsulting.com) from Reform LA Jails which is supporting our coalition.

Respectfully (in alphabetical order),

Ansar Muhammad, The H.E.L.P.E.R. Foundation

¹² Maya Lau, *Inked With a Skull In a Cowboy Hat, L.A. County Sheriff's Deputy Describes Exclusive Society of Lawmen at California Station*, L.A. Times (Aug. 4, 2018), <https://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-palmdale-sheriff-tattoo-20180804-story.html>.

¹³ Settlement Agreement, *United States v. County of Los Angeles*, No. 2:15-cv-03174 (C.D. Cal. Apr. 28, 2015) <https://www.justice.gov/file/414706/download>.

¹⁴ Antelope Valley Monitoring Team 10th Semi-Annual Report June 2020 (2020), <http://www.antelopevalleysettlementmonitoring.info/content/documents/reports/10%20Semi-Annual%20Report,%20June%202020.pdf>.



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Tyra Wallace, No Cops AV Coalition
Waunette Cullors, The WOW Flower Project, Palmdale
Yusef-Andre Wiley, Timelist Group, Inc., Lancaster



Appendix A.

ANTELOPE VALLEY UNION HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT

**Resolution to Not Renew the Contract for Services with Los Angeles Sheriff’s Department
and to Fund Alternatives to Suspension and Expulsion**

WHEREAS, Antelope Valley Union High School District has a mission to “provide a safe and secure learning environment”¹⁵ and

WHEREAS, the District “has seen a 63% reduction in its off-campus suspensions....from 5,699 suspensions in the 2012-13 academic year to 2,114 suspensions” as of March 15, 2019 and “202 overall expulsions in the 2012-13 school year to 45 expulsions as of March 15” partly due to the introduction of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports which focuses not on punishment but on a “commitment to addressing student behavior through systems change” and focused support, and

WHEREAS, the District has made other moves such as the hiring of social workers and mental health professionals to address student need, and

WHEREAS, the District, according to their most recent Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) serve a population of students that is 73.5% low-income, 10% English learners, 2% foster youth, 71% high need, and 87% students of color, and

WHEREAS, the District, particularly in light of the recent murders of George Floyd on May 25, 2020, Breonna Taylor on March 13, 2020, Ahmaud Arbery on February 23, 2020, by police officers in their respective cities, and the resulting call for a national reckoning with anti-Blackness and the part that policing plays in violence toward Black people, and

WHEREAS, as of 2018-2019, the District has a higher than national average of 17% Black student population who it is serving, and

WHEREAS, the cities of Lancaster and Palmdale have borne witness to racial disparities and deliberate racism and anti-Blackness on the part of LASD, most strikingly including an

¹⁵ AVUHSD About Page: <https://www.avdistrict.org/about>



investigation into both stations by the Department of Justice which concluded, in 2013, that “LASD’s Antelope Valley stations have engaged in a pattern or practice of discriminatory and otherwise unlawful searches and seizures” and that there is a “tolerance for misconduct”¹⁶ and

WHEREAS, AV-LASD has failed to be in full compliance with a Settlement Agreement which was reached in 2015 between LASD and parties, which included the establishment of a Monitoring Team, for the years 2018 or 2019, and

WHEREAS, the school district’s use of SROs and establishment of a contract with LASD coincided with the increase in the population of Black students and other students of color in the Antelope Valley, and

WHEREAS, research has shown that law enforcement on campuses disproportionately impact Black, Latinx and Indigenous, LGBTI+, disabled, and low-income students, increases days of instruction lost due to out of school suspensions, does not address the underlying causes or resolve issues constructively, incurs fines on families, and funnels students to the juvenile justice system which results in lower likelihood of graduation and an increased chance of future involvement with law enforcement, and

WHEREAS, AVUHSD has a duty to serve its students, taking into account their well-being and best interests, and the use of law enforcement in lieu of more research-backed and compassionate ways of addressing harm is incompatible with the well-being of students, especially students who are BIPOC, low-income, disabled, or LGBTI+.

SO, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Board of Trustees commits to not renewing the Contract for Services with the Los Angeles Sheriff’s Department for the School Resource Officers program, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that any negotiations regarding the Contract for Services with the Los Angeles Sheriff’s Department cease immediately and that SRO services be phased out by August 30, 2021, and

¹⁶ <https://lasd.org/antelopevalleycomplianceunit/>



BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Board of Trustees directs the Superintendent to create an interim safety plan for the district that does not involve the use of School Resource Officers to be presented at the Board meeting by May 1, 2021, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Board directs the Superintendent to create an AVUHSD School Safety Committee that will provide a comprehensive plan regarding:

- Disciplinary disparities
- Clear policies for the engagement of law enforcement
- Staffing, such as the hiring of more counselors
- Specific supports for BIPOC, LGBTI students, foster, and low-income students.
- Research and recommendations for programs that can best promote safety and a good school climate such as restorative justice implementation, transformative justice, consent education and others.

This committee must be diverse in its representation by including current students, a Board member, site staff, and administrative staff. This committee will launch no later than September 30th, 2020.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that School Safety groups at every high school must have representation from parents/caregivers, teachers, students, community partners, and staff and provide site-specific recommendations, and especially must have representation from those who have supported the well-being of Black students when possible, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that funds used for SRO services be reallocated towards those recommendations and programs presented by the School Safety Committee such as the introduction of restorative justice and/or transformative justice programs, support of Ethnic Studies or other programs that directly combat systemic racism and anti-Blackness, hiring more mental health support staff, wellness centers, art and music program/classes support, etc., and

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, that updates on the process of revising the current District safety plan will be presented by the Superintendent at least twice during the 2020-21 school year, and that this new district Safety plan will be adopted no later than January 1, 2021.