



## American Friends Service Committee

*St. Louis Peace Education Program*

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Dear Dr. Adams and Board of Education for the City of St. Louis

If the current moment shows us nothing, it is that we cannot go back to the way things used to be. Whether that is due to Covid-19 or the ongoing rebellion happening throughout the country, we must do things differently moving forward. As Dr. Adams puts it, “The systems that underlie our society must change, really change, and we must change them.”<sup>1</sup> Part of that change concerns how we will ensure the safety and security of the most vulnerable in black and brown communities. Our children.

The safety and security of our children in school is not a function of the presence of police or security officers in a school building. Rather, it is largely a function of individual student well-being, the health of peer relationships, and school culture.

For the last several years, Saint Louis Public Schools (“SLPS”) has demonstrated a commitment to student well-being through support of trauma-informed policy and practice. This commitment, however, is at odds with the presence of personnel who represent and in some cases cause trauma to students in school.

Thus, we call for St. Louis Public Schools to redirect the \$6.3 million<sup>2</sup> it spends on “Security Services” to areas that actually support real student safety. We demand a commitment to:

- Immediately cut any ties SLPS has with SLMPD
- Bar any future contracts with SLMPD;
- Transform the Office of Safety and Security to an Office of School Climate/Restorative Practice and Equity and restructure the role of security personnel to become mentors and Restorative Peace/Culture Keepers;
- Investment in wrap around services and enrichment programming such as
  - Therapists, Social Workers, and Counselors K-12
  - Resources around housing, job readiness, and mental health
  - After school programming
  - Restorative Justice, Anti-Racism, and Trauma Informed Programming K-12
  - Fully funded arts programs

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.slps.org/site/default.aspx?PageID=51308>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.slps.org/cms/lib/MO01001157/Centricity/Domain/12/2019-2020%20Budget%20Book%20Final%2010.30.19b.pdf>

- Institutionalization of black studies K-12
- Risk-Reduction plans for high risk youth K-12
- Accountability and the development of a response mechanism to support families and youth that experience police brutality.

"We must take all actions within our power to stop systems of oppression," said Minneapolis Public School Board Chair before voting to end MPS's contract with the city's police department.<sup>3</sup> We call on SLPS to join a growing list of school districts across the country courageously making change that will achieve real student safety.

#### **Immediately cut any ties SLPS has with SLMPD**

- Immediately cut financial, training, programmatic, or volunteer-based ties SLPS has with SLMPD by beginning of 2020/21 school year. In its place, transition current staff to or hire un-armed restorative district efforts.
  - According to "Cops and No Counselors," a 2019 report from the American Civil Liberties Union, "Data shows that the presence of school-based mental health providers not only improved outcomes for students, but can also improve overall school safety. By contrast, there is no evidence that increased police presence in schools improves schools safety. Indeed, in many cases, it causes harm."

#### **Bar any future contracts with SLMPD**

- Introduce and approve a board resolution prohibiting any future financial, training, programmatic, or volunteer based ties SLPS has with SLMPD by beginning of 2020/21 school year.

#### **Transform the Office of Safety and Security to an Office of School Climate/Restorative Practice and Equity and restructure the role of security personnel to become mentors and Restorative Peace/Culture Keepers**

- Commit to Restorative Practices as the district's approach to dealing with misbehavior in school by the beginning of the 2020/21 school year. Transition the current punitive discipline approach to a completely restorative model by hiring and training unarmed adults to facilitate restorative circles over the 2020/21 school year.
  - In the 2019 literature review "Restorative Justice in U.S. Schools: An Updated Research Review" (2019), researchers state that "nearly all of the empirical studies we reviewed report a decrease in exclusionary discipline and harmful behavior (e.g., violence) after implementing an RJ program."

#### **Investment in wrap around services and enrichment programming such as:**

- **Therapists, Social Workers, and Counselors K-12**
  - Commit to hiring more social workers to reach a student to social worker ratio of 250:1 for the 2020/21 school year or by January 2021.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.fox9.com/news/minneapolis-public-schools-board-of-education-votes-to-terminate-contract-with-mpd>

- Commit to hiring more counselors to reach a student counselor ratio of 250:1 for the FY20 - 21 fiscal year - or by January 2021.
  - With only 129 counselors, therapists, and social workers serving a district of approximately 20,000 students, SLPS does not currently meet the recommended ratios set by the American School Counselor Association or the National Association of Social Workers.
  
- **Risk-Reduction plans for high risk youth K-12**
  - Hire case managers to develop roadmaps for high risk students based on what high risk students need related to school and home for the 2020/21 school year. High risk is defined as students who have been impacted by gun violence.
  
- **Resources around housing, job readiness, and mental health**
  - Identify and partner with organizations that specialize in these needs for students and their families. Look to community organizations such as Employment Connection, Better Family Life, Urban League, and more.
  
- **Restorative Justice, Anti-Racism, and Trauma Informed Programming K-12**
  - Train all teachers, administrators, and building staff on restorative practices to bring into their classrooms by FY 20-21 or the end of the 2020/21 school year. Change student codes of conduct to reflect a shift away from punitive discipline to a restorative approach by the beginning of the 2020/21 school year. Hire de-escalators in each school to support conflict resolution, peer mediation, and facilitate restorative circles by the beginning of the 2021/22 school year.
  - Train all teachers, administrators, and building staff on anti-racism in education to bring into their classrooms and school buildings by FY 20-21 or the end of the 2020/21 school year.
  - Train all teachers, administrators, and building staff on trauma-informed practices in education to bring into their classrooms and school buildings by FY 20-21 or the end of the 2020/21 school year.
  
- **Fully funded arts programs**
  - Ensure that every school in the district has state of the fine arts equipment and that fine arts teachers are paid at competitive salaries.
    - In a 2019 randomized controlled study of 10,548 students enrolled in 42 schools across Houston, Texas, researchers found "arts-learning experiences benefit students in terms of reductions in disciplinary infractions, increases in compassion for others and improvements in writing achievement. Furthermore, arts-education experiences improve school engagement and college aspirations (Houston Education Research Consortium, 2019).
    - A 2010 study by the Missouri Alliance for Arts Education found that across Missouri schools, those districts with higher levels of student enrollment in art classes had higher attendance rates, higher

graduation rates, lower student discipline rates, and improved standardized test scores in math and communication arts (Missouri Alliance for Arts Education, 2010).

### **Institutionalization of black studies K-12**

- Create and carry out a curriculum of black history, literature, and art that will serve as a required course that all SLPS students must take by the 2021/22 school year.
  - In 2014, Chicago Public Schools introduced a comprehensive Interdisciplinary African and African-American Studies curriculum that interwove the themes of dignity, identity, and culture through all core subjects--history, english, art, and math.
  - The University of Missouri's Carter Center for K-12 Black History Education "leverages history educators, social studies teachers, community educators, policy makers as well as other advocates to transform Black history education in today's public, private, and homeschooled environments." Additional potential partners include Saint Louis University and Washington University's Black Studies programs.

### **Accountability and the development of a response mechanism to support families and youth that experience police brutality.**

- Introduce and adopt a board resolution requiring SLPS give support to the families of SLPS students murdered by SLMPD. Support looks like administration making home visits to families, emergency assemblies where students can mourn the loss of their peer, administration denouncing murder in the media, and meeting with lawmakers to influence policy addressing police brutality. As a district that serves majority black students, it is deafening when there are no calls for justice and healing in cases where SLPS students and alums are murdered by SLMPD.

We look forward to partnering with you in helping to achieve real student safety.

Sincerely,

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