

I am writing this email as a proud alumnus of Palomar College. I graduated with my Associates Degree in 2010, and I transferred to Cal State San Marcos that same year. I went on to achieve my Bachelor's Degree in Literature and Writing in 2013. My teaching credentials and Master's Degree in education also came from CSUSM. This is my sixth year as a middle school English teacher.

Throughout my higher education, I was constantly reminded of my positive experiences at Palomar. The affordability of community college made it possible for me to find my passion through exploring different courses while I prepared to transfer. My three younger siblings have also benefited from their time at Palomar and have gone on to start fulfilling careers.

It saddens me to hear the news surrounding Palomar today. The ways that funds are being spent make it difficult to give students the opportunities I had during my time there. Cuts to classes and programs limit the experiences of all students— and there are students of every background imaginable— while they attempt to further their education.

I recall how my world opened up when I started attending Palomar. As an 18 year old, I met fellow students who were different than anyone I knew in my small town. My classmates ranged in age, culture, and dreams. I recall a 90 year old war veteran keeping his mind sharp by taking creative writing classes, a Latina single mother of three trying to enter a nursing program while working nights, and a girl from Sri Lanka (a country I'd never heard of at the time) who worked with me in our biology lab and shared stories of her family's immigration to the United States. There is no "typical" community college student, even though popular culture loves to stereotype us. In every classroom, there are people pursuing opportunities they wouldn't otherwise have.

I remember taking a class from a professor at Palomar who shared this story: she had been told that getting a Master's degree was out of her reach because English was a second language to her. Instead of believing that statement, she went on to get her Master's degree and became a professor with a goal of helping other students who had similarly been told they couldn't achieve the things they wanted.

Every professor I had at Palomar exuded these same tenacious ideals. They were encouraging, understanding, and truly supportive of the many diverse learners in their classes. What a rare thing to begin a college career in an intimate classroom versus a vast auditorium-- to get to know professors and classmates instead of being just a number on a roster. I owe much of my professional success to the two years I spent at Palomar, building the lasting relationships that set me on my career path.

I hope that Palomar College's current leadership remembers that every financial decision has a ripple effect that affects individuals' lives.

Thank you,

Jenna Murphy

As a proud alumni of Palomar College, I am troubled by the news of recent events. Friends from the Palomar community have reached out to me, and have expressed their dismay with the governing body of the campus and their distrust of President Joi Lin Blake. I was astounded to hear that Palomar College is experiencing a \$11 million shortfall that threatens the education of its students with class and program cuts. When I left Palomar in 2014, the school was on an incline of prosperity and growth. Now, that growth appears to be threatened by mismanagement from the person tasked with securing the future of the college, President Blake.

With budget cuts looming over the campus, it's deplorable of her to reward herself with a \$1 million suite in the new library. It's undefendable for a public servant to requisition funds to build an unnecessary and extravagant office; It is especially abhorrent when an administrator of education endows upon him or herself a luxury with public funds.

What I find most egregious is the fact that President Blake and her defenders have accused Palomar's faculty of being racist. This accusation is a blatant straw-man defense used to avert misgivings against her. I am a Mexican-American, and in my time at Palomar, I was never a recipient of racist remarks or biases from students or faculty. I have complete confidence in the faculty.

I regret that I did not have the privilege to vote against President Blake at the October 22 faculty meeting. If I had, I might have been the loudest voice in the room, but please, consider this email as my own vote of no confidence against President Blake. I unfortunately cannot attend the Governing Board meeting on November 12, but be assured that I will be watching. I hope every administrator of Palomar college does what is best for its students: I believe the best will require the removal of President Blake.

Sincerely,  
Benjamin Acosta  
Class of 2014

I felt the need to write this email in response to my growing concern and displeasure at what I have been reading about my former school. Palomar afforded me many, many opportunities that I am grateful for. But recently anytime I see something about Palomar it is in a negative context. Racist-fueled comments, misappropriation of funds among other things. So I have to ask, what happened?

Referring to Palomar as Mississippi with palm trees in order to describe its racial diversity is literally the most racist thing I've seen come out of that campus, and the fact that this comment came from a trustee is sickening and shameful. Generalizing a group of people based on your skewed view of them is the definition of racism and I can only assume that this veiled attempt at poking humor at a serious issue is how Mr. Evilsizer deals with topics that he is uninformed on. This blatant attempt to place the burden of poor leadership on something as hot button as racism is a sad attempt to pass the buck. I honestly doubt the two hours he spends out on campus make him an expert on race relations at Palomar. One thing I was taught at while attending school was to critically think, to look at things not just as they appear on the surface, and to not make a snap decision. Mr. Evilsizer did none of those things in this statement and should formally apologize to the faculty and students of Palomar for his baseless and frankly insulting comment. As a former member of the military, I know firsthand how a good leader can inspire morale and how a toxic one can kill it. Mr. Evilsizer is doing the opposite of inspiration; he's dividing, and we already have enough of that in this country.

As a public institution, Palomar should account for how money is spent. While I'm all for the creation of new library just as I was all for the new student union that was built when I was attending, what is the reasoning behind an office for an individual worth over a million dollars in a brand new library? I have to ask why anyone would need a million dollar office? My job has afforded me the opportunity to sit in the offices of some of the most powerful people in not only this country but others as well, and I can safely say that outside of the executive levels in Washington DC, none of them had a million dollar office. How many programs suffered because of this frivolous spending? You cannot honestly sit there and tell me that there was not a better use for a million dollars? You cut student programs while your salaries will no doubt grow, and that is wrong.

What I believe that you're failing to realize is that you're not the only community college in San Diego county, and as you slowly take programs away there will no doubt be a decline in enrollment, that's how these things work. Believe me Miramar and Mesa Colleges are not as inconvenient to get to as you think. I chose Palomar for a reason, like I'm sure many other alumni did, because it was the best community college in San Diego. With everything that's happening there now, I'm not so sure that's the case anymore, and that is the most shameful thing.

Christopher Pearson

To say that I am disappointed and infuriated by the lack of responsible leadership at Palomar College would be a gross understatement. For many students—myself included—community college was and is the only way to pursue higher education. I graduated high school with honors and a 4.1 GPA and couldn't afford to go to a 4-year school. I applied, I got in, and financial aid was simply not enough. Palomar was my only option, and it ended up being so formative and valuable and important for both my education and my personal growth. I would not be a college graduate with next to no debt and a fighting chance at a financially sustainable future, or a shot at a Master's program, without Palomar.

My heart absolutely breaks for the professors and students affected by the mismanagement of funds by President Blake and the corruption that has taken root within the Board of Trustees. I was told going into community college that my professors wouldn't care, and I'm thankful and overjoyed to say that that was not true—I have yet to encounter a professor who did not care about me and my educational goals. Their compassion and willingness to nurture my goals while challenging me to grow has been invaluable. I cannot thank them enough. That being said, it angers me that the leaders of Palomar College are not supporting their teachers, and, by extension, their students.

### **To the Board of Trustees:**

There are safeguards in place for the good of the college and the student and teaching community it serves. Keyword: SERVES. The Board does not exist for the sake of the President's comfort, standard of living, or ego. The Board exists as a safeguard, a checks and balances system that puts others, namely its students, first. If you have lost sight of that and refuse to take responsibility for your actions, have decided to succumb to groupthink, or have opted for self-preservation over doing the right thing, then you are just as unfit for leadership as your president.

Educational institutions can only help the students they hope to serve if they are sustainable, and all of the evidence I have encountered suggests otherwise. For instance, opening two additional education centers simultaneously, while appearing to be a positive contribution to the community, was and is not financially sustainable. Plunging the college into more financial distress ultimately does nothing to help students or professors. Well-intentioned and well-considered are two very different things.

Adding to the financial crisis is the extravagant and unnecessary salary raise that you approved for President Blake when you have students scraping by to get an education. Cost of living adequately—even comfortably—in California does not require a salary of that size, and a responsible leader who already has her needs met should have considered forgoing a further pay increase (even a contractual one) when the institution she's responsible for is struggling for resources. Again, I implore both the Board and President Blake to reexamine their motives for serving at Palomar College.

As the Board of Trustees, you bear a responsibility to consider the actions of the president and work for the good of the institution you have chosen to serve. Under "Termination of Agreement" in the "[Palomar Community College District Employee Agreement Superintendent/President](#)," Section 5, "Evaluation and Performance Objectives," the Board's

responsibilities include an annual assessment of the President's performance. In the following section (6c) under "Termination by the Board Without Cause," number 4 specifies: "Notwithstanding any other provision of this Agreement to the contrary, if the Board believes, and subsequently confirms through an independent audit, that the Superintendent/President has engaged in fraud, misappropriation of funds, or other illegal fiscal practices, the Superintendent/President shall not be entitled to cash, salary payments, health benefits, or other non-cash settlement as set forth above, consistent with Government Code 53260(b)."

Given the [simultaneous opening of the two satellite campuses, the absurd pay raise, the \\$1 million renovation of a presidential library suite that was not fully approved by the Board, and the illegal use of public funds on frivolous purchases of gifts for trustees and various other individuals in high places, the Board has more than justifiable cause to terminate.](#) I implore you, as an alumni of Palomar College and a believer in the merits of higher education, please examine your motives. Why are you in this position if you are choosing to ignore blatant breaches of contract? What is keeping you from pursuing accountability and doing the job that's been entrusted to you?

### **To Trustee Evilsizer:**

[Your racially charged and frankly horrific and ignorant comment is abhorrent.](#) Period. There is no excuse for racism. I'm shocked that a well-educated man—political affiliation aside—would make such an insensitive comment. I'm not particularly liberal in my politics, Trustee Evilsizer, but your comment grieves my heart deeply. You have disrespected not only your current students, but the history and legacy of those who have fought, often with dire consequences, for equality in education. When you strip anyone of their humanity, you become the worst kind of oppressor.

On top of this uninformed comment, you award the president a ridiculous and sickening pay raise that is so completely unnecessary to live a financially stable life in North County. Need I remind you that your obligation and responsibility is to your student population first. Do not blame others for your irresponsibility and failure to steward your resources well. You are an adult. Be accountable.

As a child of educators, I have heard horror stories about how school districts are mismanaged, and people have been fired for far less than your comment. Frankly, I'm shocked that you still have a position on the board—further evidence that the accountability of Palomar's leadership is failing.

You know what the right thing is and you are deliberately choosing not to do it. And that behavior is simply abhorrent. How could you possibly justify robbing students and staff of resources they need for an affordable and quality education?

Be accountable. Your professors and students are worth it.

Elizabeth Hoffman

To the Board of Trustees,

I spent three incredible years growing and gathering significant moments and life lessons on the campus of Palomar College. Each day that I walked into my classrooms between the years of 2013 and 2016 felt like a gleaming opportunity. I felt safe, respected, heard, and celebrated by my professors and fellow students. This truly precious relationship I have with my alma mater is entirely due to the culture of Palomar College's campus: colorful, open-minded, tolerant, and *diverse*. It is unbelievably upsetting for me to see an institution that was so intentionally built as an inclusive and enriching environment for every single student be recklessly dragged in the mud by Dr. Joi Lin Blake who clearly does not have a fraction of the respect for our community that our community members have for each other. Palomar College is better than this. Palomar's students *deserve* better than this. You say that young people are the future. You must *invest* in us. Give us leaders who will advocate for our needs, who will give us the solid foundation we need to succeed and make our Palomar College family proud. Give us a leader who at the very least will not betray their community members and abuse their power. It is not too late to take action to begin healing the wounds caused by Dr. Blake's carelessness and selfishness.

Sincerely,  
Roxanne Conowitch

My name is Dayna Giehl. I'm a Palomar College alumnus, and I'm writing to express my concerns regarding the current leadership at Palomar College.

On October 8, 2019 during a Palomar College Governing Board meeting, Trustee Mark Evilsizer described the campus atmosphere at Palomar as "Mississippi with palm trees," suggesting that recent criticism regarding Palomar's leadership is akin to a state with a long history of racial oppression. Evilsizer's insinuation that the campus atmosphere at Palomar College breeds a culture of racism is disingenuous and deflects the valid criticisms that have emerged from students and faculty regarding Dr. Joi Lin Blake's leadership.

President Blake has consistently made impulsive decisions that have created ongoing distress on campus, and she has ignored the overall needs of students to prioritize her own self-interests. She has also created a campaign of disinformation regarding Palomar's financial crisis, and she has refused to acknowledge her own role in the decline of the college's fiscal health. One larger concern I have is President Blake's role in creating a negative workplace environment for administrators and faculty. Rather than accepting constructive criticism offered to her in a respectful manner, President Blake has consistently ignored the expertise of administrators and threatened those who speak out against her decisions. She has, in fact, taken away from the safe and diverse culture at Palomar that I experienced during my years there.

I'd like to share some of my personal experiences at Palomar College to shine a light on the culture of diversity on campus that the Board of Trustees and the Governing Board have failed to acknowledge. During my time at Palomar college, I had the opportunity to work on the college's award-winning literary Magazine, the *Bravura*, with an amazing group of students and faculty. The magazine celebrated the creative works from students with a variety of cultural backgrounds and diverse experiences. My fellow students and I were also inspired by the variety of classes we took at Palomar to start the Gender and Women's Studies Club and lead important conversations about intersectionality and diversity in our society. When I transferred to CSUSM after my time at Palomar College, I quickly became involved in the campus' Gender Equity and LGBTQ+ centers, and I continued to involve myself in social justice across campus and in my community.

I fell in love with Palomar College for the culture of diversity on campus that made my college experience not only educational, but meaningful. I believe that the education and opportunities that I received at Palomar College prepared me to be a more socially conscious and involved member of our community, and I continue to use the lessons I learned at Palomar in my work and in my personal life.

My hope is that the Board of Trustees and the Governing Board will come to see how beautifully diverse the culture is at Palomar College. My hope is that the Board of Trustees and the Governing Board will do everything in their power to hold the President accountable for her actions and protect Palomar College moving forward.

Sincerely,

Dayna R. Giehl, B.A.