

## **Transformative Wellness Retreat for Faculty Teaching in Prisons**

By Kellie Nadler

Faculty and staff teaching in California prisons will get the opportunity to “practice what they preach” this fall when they convene in the woods for a weekend of wellness and professional development. The retreat marks the final meeting of the [Sustaining Futures Community of Practice](#) — an initiative aimed at helping in-prison educators beat high rates of burnout and implement trauma-informed and resiliency-based goals for their college’s in-prison programs.

Faculty from nearly 20 California colleges are invited to join the retreat September 26 to 29 for a multi-day statewide professional development opportunity offered to college educators working in prisons. They’ll focus on establishing a programmatic culture that prioritizes employee wellness and trauma-informed classrooms interactions to better serve students. Sessions will cover topics such as trauma-responsive andragogy, understanding resiliency from a programmatic perspective, and culturally responsive classroom management.

Instead of convening on a campus or in a hotel conference space, the group will stay in cabins in the woods and convene in mess halls. Days will start with nature hikes or yoga classes and working lunches will be held as picnics. Participants will be provided the space and opportunity to put into practice many of the wellness modalities they’ve identified as key to beating overwhelm and burnout.

The Kern Community College district (which includes Cerro Coso and Bakersfield colleges) is leading this charge to organize the event, thanks to a Chancellor’s Office Innovation Award. The grant enables the district to provide professional development opportunities to other colleges teaching in state prisons.

California’s community college system is enormous —with 72 districts and 115 colleges, 17 of which are teaching face-to-face at 32 of the 35 prisons throughout the state. Together, they provide more than 300 in person courses to more than 4,500 incarcerated students in our state prisons. Kern’s two colleges alone teach more 1,000 students experiencing incarceration and represent California’s largest providers of face-to-face college in prison.

For California colleges teaching in state prisons, registration is coming soon.