



The Children's Project ACADEMY

Building a Residential Charter School for Foster Youth, Grades 7-12

Frequently Asked Questions

I. Inquiries Regarding the Academy Generally

A. How do you know this residential education model will result in better outcomes for teens?

Current outcomes for foster children are undeniably dismal. After leaving foster care, approximately 80% of young men experience homelessness or incarceration by age 20, and approximately 60% of young women become pregnant by age 20. On average, less than 50% of foster children graduate from high school, far underperforming the United States average of 84% for non-foster care youth. While 70% of teens that emancipate from foster care express a desire to go to college, fewer than 10% actually enroll in college. Of those who enroll in college, less than 1% graduate. We can do better. Our goal with residential education through the Academy focuses on producing well educated, productive citizens who contribute positively to their community. Our goal is 100% graduation from high school, which alone will constitute a dramatic improvement over the status quo. See question I.C below regarding other residential models that consistently achieve dramatically improved outcomes for foster youth. Because we agree with UCSB Dean Jane Connelly that education is *the* single greatest therapeutic tool in overcoming adversity, we expect many other outcomes for Academy students to similarly improve (e.g., self esteem, respect for community, and physical and mental health). As an ancillary benefit, improved outcomes for foster youth will provide long term collateral benefits to the community as well.

B. What is wrong with placing Santa Barbara foster kids out of Santa Barbara County?

While there are some out of county placements that work well for some foster youth (e.g., a supportive and long-term placement with a nearby out of county relative), many challenges are associated with placing foster youth out of county. First, out of county placement creates an enormous burden on our county resources, both human and capital. Not only is it costly in terms of transportation to send foster youth out of county, the county also is required to pay for parents, social workers and attorneys to visit the youth out of county. Given that the county is currently forced to place students to the far reaches of California and even out of state, these expenses are significant. Second, statistics demonstrate that the majority of youth placed out of county inevitably return to their county (primarily because birth relatives or other roots exist there). They return as young adults after foster care concludes, and they bring with them all of the issues and problems acquired in frequently difficult, multiple placements. Ultimately, lacking well developed community roots, life skills, a quality education and the prospect for higher education or vocational training, these young adults are ill-equipped to handle problems, and the community bears the burden of these situations.

C. Is this academy modeled after any other programs and, if so, what are their outcomes?

The Board of Directors has investigated, visited, and continues to communicate productively with several other successful residential education programs, including San Pasqual Academy (in San Diego, California), SEED Public Charter School (in Washington, D.C.), The Hershey School (in Pennsylvania), Eagle Rock (in Colorado), and Yemin Orde (in Israel). The San Pasqual Academy operates a similar model of academic challenge, supportive residential housing, and intergenerational involvement for foster youth grades 9-12. It currently serves 135 children, and has shown measurable success in helping foster youth complete high school and move into college, vocational school, or employment opportunities. Students attending the SEED Public Charter School, a boarding school for youths from low income families, have demonstrated significant progress in academic achievement compared to their peers. The Academy will benefit greatly by modeling the success of these existing programs.

D. What are your measures of success for the Academy?

We intend to measure success based on the following three criteria:

1. Graduation from High School: aim of 100% graduation rate;
2. A well-defined path for each student, leading to a vocational career or higher education; and
3. A sense of belonging, a “home” and community for each student, leading to healthier adult outcomes, which will be measured through participation by

students in Academy activities and programs, both during their tenure at the school and beyond, as part of a thriving alumni association.

E. How many students will you serve?

In Phase I, 40 students total, 20 in each of grades 7-8, will enter the Academy. At full build-out, each year the Academy will serve 120 students in grades 7-12, with approximately 20 students per grade.

F. Is there a ramp-up plan?

Yes, the Academy will open with approximately 20 students in each of grades 7 and 8. The Board currently plans to add twenty additional 7th grade students per year, resulting in occupancy at the end of five years of approximately 120 students in grades 7 through 12, with 20 students in each grade.

G. What is a typical profile of a student at the Academy?

The typical student at the Academy will be a student who, through no fault of his or her own, has been brought under the jurisdiction of the Dependency Court. Eighty percent of the foster children from this county are in the Dependency Court due to their parents' drug or alcohol abuse. The average foster child performs three grades below grade level and has suffered multiple placements. The Academy will address these issues consistently and proactively to best eliminate or minimize any negative consequences of each student's personal history.

H. Isn't this just a modern-day orphanage?

No. Orphanages were created to care for children who have no biological families and the orphanages were funded privately. Our government foster care system is set up so that society can care for those children whose families are deemed by society to be incapable of caring for them. As a society we make a decision to remove children when their biological family environment is unacceptable due to neglect or abuse, and the Academy presents an opportunity to successfully fulfill our obligation to care well for those children, including by providing a nurturing environment and a high quality, well rounded education. The only replication of the orphanage experience at the Academy will be a beneficial one, which is the positive long term nature of the placement that will provide a sense of roots and community for each student.

I. How many employees will the Academy require?

Including all standard campus, care and education-related employees, as well as those associated with anticipated enrichment programs, we currently project that at full capacity the Academy will employ approximately 150 people.

J. What programs will be offered at the Academy (beyond academics)?

The Academy plans to offer a wide range of programs, including: independent living skills, vocational training, career and other counseling, arts, athletics, clubs, public service, environmental studies, and media studies. In addition, the Academy will offer programs directed specifically at promoting healthy birth-family relationships, which will also provide an ancillary benefit to younger siblings, who can see and experience the success and of their older siblings in the Academy. To further support the Academy students, senior citizens will live on campus and develop foster-grandparent relationships with students and, in return, likely benefit themselves from such mentoring responsibilities. We also will partner with other community-based organizations. Directly and by example, the Academy will teach the meaning and importance of volunteerism and community support, and will encourage and support each student in identifying both individual and group volunteer projects in the community.

K. What are the expected employee-student and faculty-student ratios?

As a result of the wide range of programs that we plan to offer (see preceding question), current projections reflect a planned community employee-student ratio at full occupancy of approximately 150 employees per 120 students (a 1.25 to 1 ratio), and a student-faculty ratio of 12 to 1.

L. Do you have a contract with the County to place foster children in the Academy?

The County officially does not contract to place children, but it may choose to have a Memorandum of Understanding with a provider. From the beginning, the County has been an active participant in the planning of the Academy and is looking forward to placing foster youth in the Academy. While the Judges in each dependency case, and not the County, have responsibility for placement of foster youth, the County makes recommendations to the Court that are accorded great weight. Based on our interaction with the County to date, as we approach the opening day of the Academy we anticipate entering into a Memorandum of Understanding with the County regarding placements of students at the Academy. Please see also questions III.A and III.L, below.

M. Who is writing your Charter Petition?

An Education Committee was appointed and charged by the Board of Directors with writing the Charter Petition for the Academy. Members of the Education Committee include recognized education specialists who collaborated with UCSB and the County Education Office to prepare the Charter Petition. The Board of Directors also retained Mr. Paul Cummins, a renowned educator who successfully opened several charter schools and published several related books. Mr. Cummins worked

closely with the Education Committee to guide it with respect to the curriculum for the Academy.

N. Are you consulting with the local boarding schools to learn from their expertise?

Yes, Cate and Dunn in particular have provided planning guidance for the Academy.

O. Will inter-school athletics be available?

Yes, we intend to provide inter-school athletics whenever possible. While the projected enrollment at the Academy is not large (at 120 students), another similar-sized residential education program, San Pasqual Academy (in San Diego, California), recently fielded an 8-man football team that won the county championship.

II. Inquiries Regarding Academy Policies

(Note: Many of these policies will be subject to refinement by the Head of School and the Governing Board over time)

A. How will discipline issues be addressed?

The Academy will have very clear expectations regarding student behavior, and these expectations will be re-affirmed and re-enforced continually in daily life. A Student Handbook will be given to every student each year describing these expectations for behavior and conduct, as well as clearly identifying consequences for violations. Pursuant to the Academy Charter Petition, a disciplinary committee will be charged by the Board of Directors with carefully analyzing and assessing each potential discipline issue in accordance with documented school policy.

B. Will the students have jobs—on campus or off?

Yes, we believe that work experience is an integral part of a student's learning experience.

C. Will the students be able to have cars?

Residential students will not have cars. The Academy may offer courses in driver's training leading to licensing of students, depending upon policies to be set by the Board.

D. Will the students have computers in their rooms?

The Academy intends to provide laptop computers for every student, which they may use in their rooms and elsewhere on the campus. Whether Internet service should be available in the rooms of boarding students, however, remains a hot topic of debate in boarding schools nationally, and the Board has not yet set a policy on this matter for the Academy.

E. Will all of the students be foster youth?

Yes.

F. Will you accept students from the juvenile justice system?

The majority of the students will come from the Dependency Court, meaning that they are not part of the juvenile justice system. There are some youth, however, who overlap the Delinquency and Dependency Courts, and some of these youth may be potential students at the Academy.

- G. What if a student is reunited with his or her biological parents while attending the Academy?

Because our primary objective is to provide a stable school placement, students who reunify with their biological families will be encouraged to become day students at the Academy. Just as traditional boarding school models have day students (*e.g.*, locally, Cate, Thatcher, Midland and Dunn), we would hope to facilitate the continuity of their education and personal growth through their continued attendance as day students; charter school funding would remain available for day students.

- H. How will you deal with a student who isn't ready to graduate at the end of his or her senior year?

Pursuant to the Academy Charter Petition, we will provide the option of an additional "enrichment" year for students who are not quite ready, as determined by their faculty and advisors, to graduate at the end of their senior year. Based upon models from other facilities, we expect the number of students who qualify for an enrichment year to be quite small. Because government foster care funding can extend until a student earns a high school diploma or until age 20, whichever is earlier, the optional enrichment year can be accommodated within the current budgets.

- I. Do you have a plan to provide medical and dental care for the students?

Yes, we will have a medical clinic at the Academy to provide medical and dental care for the students. Government funding for foster care includes funding streams to cover medical and dental care and these streams will help fund the medical clinic at the Academy.

- J. How will you deal with students who desire to attend religious services?

For students who express a desire to attend religious services, we will work to facilitate attendance, in conjunction with the organizations the students desire to attend.

- K. How will you accommodate day students?

Following in the traditions of traditional boarding schools, day students will be encouraged to spend most of each weekday on campus.

- L. Will Academy employees be unionized?

There are various unions that may have jurisdiction over different categories of employees at the Academy: for example, state teachers unions and house-parent unions. The Academy will comply with all applicable union rules and regulations.

III. Inquiries Regarding Academy Funding

A. Are you doing a traditional feasibility study?

We are not doing a traditional feasibility study. From a fundraising standpoint, a standard first step for many traditional non-profits would be a feasibility study to measure the community's climate and timing for conducting a donor campaign. However, as a residential school for foster youth that will operate on governmental income streams, the Academy does not fit the traditional model for a non-profit organization. Unlike traditional non-profits, upon completion of construction, the Academy will be financially self-sustaining, as a result of governmental income for foster care and charter schooling. In addition, much of the detailed preliminary work in founding the Academy arose out of an original Steering Committee comprised of 30 community members concerned with foster youth issues, including community leaders and governmental heads, such as a presiding juvenile court judge and department heads of various social services. The Steering Committee conducted interviews with the community to determine community support of the Academy, and community support was high. Finally, as we continue our focus on developing the infrastructure of the organization through the Academy Board of Directors and various advisory committees, we continue and enhance our communication with past, present and future donors, and are pursuing a plan to raise the necessary non-governmental capital to construct the Academy through a donor campaign.

B. How will you raise the money to build the school?

We plan to raise the funds to construct the Academy through a combination of philanthropic support, local, state and federal grants and, potentially, a bond issue.

C. When will the Academy open and what are your timelines?

We expect to break ground in 2010 and open the Academy for the first students in 2011 or 2012.

D. What is the status of your funding and financing to date?

The Academy has not yet begun its official capital campaign. Nonetheless, to date the Academy has received over \$900,000 in government grants and philanthropic support, including a grant from the California State Department of Education of \$45,000.

E. How much of the operating costs will be paid by government sources?

As set forth in detail in the projected operating budgets for both (i) the charter school income stream, and (ii) the foster care income stream, all standard living and educational operating costs are projected to be paid in full annually by governmental sources; to the extent necessary and as determined by the Board of Directors, additional, optional enrichment programs will be funded via philanthropic contributions. Typically, for other programs comparable to the Academy, these enriching services are supported by philanthropic contributions in the range of ten percent of annual expenses. See also question III.G below.

F. How much of the upfront costs will be paid by government sources?

While governmental income streams provide the solid backbone for funding *operating* expenses, governmental sources for land acquisition and construction costs are available to a far lesser extent (if at all), particularly prior to the opening of Phase I of the Academy. While the Board of Directors continues to pursue these sources, it cannot presently estimate with accuracy how much, if any, the Academy likely will receive for land acquisition and construction related expenses for Phase I of the Academy. By law, once a charter school is operating, other options for government funding and financing of construction and expansion may become available; the Board looks forward to pursuing aggressively these options after the Academy opens.

G. How much will it cost to operate the Academy?

On an operating basis, the Academy is financially self reliant, which means that standard living and academic needs are budgeted to be fully provided by governmental income streams, predominantly through the two arenas of charter school and foster care funding, and supplemented through additional available governmental programs. Living and academic expenses beyond those that are considered standard will be supplemented through philanthropic contributions. The Academy is currently working with operating projections that reflect annual budgets of approximately \$1,050,000 funded by the charter school component of governmental revenues, and \$7,300,000 funded by the foster care component of governmental revenues.

H. Hasn't Oprah Winfrey opened an Academy Internationally? Have you talked with her, given that she lives in Santa Barbara?

We have not talked to Oprah Winfrey. We are encouraged, however, that leaders in our community, including Ms. Winfrey, strongly support residential education programs for youth in need, and would welcome enthusiastically the opportunity to meet with her and all others who may be interested in supporting the Academy.

I. Where will the Academy be located?

As currently planned, the Academy will be located in Santa Barbara County in the Los Alamos area.

J. Do you own the land?

The Board has been actively evaluating land options, including performing in depth development due diligence with respect to a few discreet parcels. This is a dynamic process and as some of the information gleaned is confidential and/or at various stages in the process, rather than printing it here, we invite you to contact us for more specific information concerning the land, so that we may provide the most current, non-confidential information available.

K. Have you looked for existing facilities where you wouldn't have to build from scratch?

The Board of Directors investigated fervently for a year whether any existing site in the County could be acquired for the Academy. After a robust and thorough search, the Board concluded that no existing facility provided a feasible location for the Academy.

L. Are you working with other agencies in town that serve foster youth?

Yes, leaders from various local agencies and organizations, including CASA, CASA PACIFA, CALM, and FSA (Family Service Agency), were all members of the original Steering Committee for the Academy, and we continue to appreciate and work productively with these agencies in our plans for the Academy. The Academy will be part of an array of options for foster youth, who will have differing needs and "fit" in various programs, and the Academy will work in cooperation, not in competition, with other agencies and organizations, including a myriad of governmental organizations and many hard working non-profit organizations, to provide broad and comprehensive solutions for our foster youth.

M. What are the Academy construction plans?

The Board of Directors retained has the architectural firm of Westberg & White in Association with Don Avery, and has been working with them diligently since early 2007. We currently are involved in the exciting and dynamic process of finalizing draft designs for the Academy campus. Further explanation of these designs is set forth in Section IV of the Academy Business Plan. See question III.C above regarding projected timelines.

N. How can I donate funds?

Thank you for your question! Included as the last sheet of this FAQ document is a donation form with instructions. You may also print this form from our website, www.childrensprojectsb.org. If you have any questions about a donation, please feel free to call us at 805-637-3790.