



The
Children's Project
ACADEMY

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

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The Children's Project Foundation receives approval to create Nation's first residential charter school for foster teens

Santa Barbara, CA – Today the Santa Barbara County Board of Education paved the way for the creation of the Nation's first residential charter school for foster teens when the board enthusiastically approved the charter petition for The Children's Project Academy.

"This is an important milestone toward our goal of changing outcomes for our foster youth," said Wendy Read, Children's Project CEO. "Foster kids often face repeated moves during their teen years. This instability affects their educational success and makes it nearly impossible to teach them the life skills they need for self-sufficiency and independence as adults."

The Children's Project campus will be built on 114 acres of land the foundation purchased last fall in Los Alamos. When fully operational, the boarding school will serve 120 students, grades 7-12 and will feature teachers and foster grand parents living alongside the students to offer a strong community of support for foster teens.

The staff at the Santa Barbara County Education Office had reviewed all aspects of the proposed charter in recommending to the board that it approve the petition. In saluting the board after the 6-0 vote to approve, Santa Barbara County Superintendent of Schools Bill Cirone praised the county board for its vision and support.

"In approving this petition you are helping keep the dream alive," said Cirone, referring to his office's many projects designed to help students who face the most challenges and have the fewest advocates.

"The County Board of Education's vote today is a wonderful recognition of the strong academic curriculum and program we have spent five years designing," said Read.

"This proposal provides hope for the many foster youth in our county who face daunting challenges," said Cirone. "By providing a stable, safe, and supportive environment, coupled with an excellent, well crafted curriculum, The Children's Project is providing a lifeline that is sure to make a difference in the lives of children. That is the mission we all share and we are pleased and proud to be a part of such a promising undertaking."

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With the approval of the Academy charter, the Children's Project Foundation moves into the next phase of fundraising to build the campus. The organization needs to raise an estimated \$1.5 million to reach groundbreaking next year.

"We are so grateful for the confidence our supporters have demonstrated to get us to this point," said Read. "We own land, we have our school charter and we have conceptual plans for a green campus that preserves open space and is integrated and aesthetically compatible with the intimate community in which it will reside."

And the new school can't come too soon. According to a report by the Stuart Foundation, the typical foster youth changes homes about once every six months, resulting in an average of four to six months loss in educational attainment with each move. Therefore it is not surprising that 50% of foster youth repeat one or more grades in school, and only 50% of foster youth complete high school.

"When kids are removed from their homes due to neglect or abuse – through no fault of their own – and end up in the foster care system, we owe them a better life than the one they've escaped," said Read. "We have to do a better job of caring for these kids. And we think a great education in a safe and stable environment, is a good place to start."

The mission of The Children's Project Academy is to:

- Provide a year-round, academically rigorous program within a residential community of support, stability and continuity;
- Ensure that every student will graduate with a high school diploma;
- Empower every student to set and achieve the highest educational goals, and to attain vocational, social and life-skills indispensable to a successful future.

Background:

The Children's Project began almost 6 years ago when community leaders met to improve outcomes for Santa Barbara County foster youth. At the time, it was an innovative idea to bring together nonprofit leaders, governmental agency heads, community leaders and judges in a collaborative effort to solve a community problem. The result of this nearly two-year effort was the formation of The Children's Project Foundation.

For additional information about The Children's Project Academy, visit www.childrensprojectsb.org

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