



## **Proposed Los Angeles Model for a Residential Academy**

### **Background:**

- September 28<sup>th</sup> 2004 Board Motion by Supervisor Yvonne Burke directing DCFS to issue a Request For Interest/Information (RFI) that defines a residential academy for foster youth, identifies the target population and specifies the outcomes to be produced
- RFI issued in December 2004. Twenty-eight responses were received from:

Supervisory District 1 - 1  
District 2 - 12  
District 3 - 5  
District 4 - 2  
District 5 - 2

\*Six applications didn't specify a district or were from countywide or non-LA County organizations

- Responses were grouped by DCFS into four models:
  - A) Community-Based Home with Public or Non-Public Education - 19
  - B) Residential with On-Grounds School - 3
  - C) Residential with Public or Non-Public Education - 3
  - D) Charter school with Residential Component - 2

\*One response didn't propose a model

- In April, ECC was asked by DCFS and the BOS children's deputies to study the feasibility of creating a residential academy for Los Angeles foster youth
- ECC agreed to establish a workgroup to develop recommendations regarding such an academy for presentation at the Council's July meeting. This workgroup was asked to look at successful academy models, such as the San Pasqual Academy in San Diego County, as well as existing best practices that could be replicated. Alternative uses of resources were also to be explored.

- ECC staff reviewed the RFI responses and spoke with David Sanders, Board of Supervisors Children's Deputies, Judge Nash, Children's Commissioners and other key stakeholders regarding their ideas
- The Residential Academy Workgroup included BOS children's deputies, the County Children's Commission, DCFS, Probation, Pasadena Unified School District, ACHSA, Resource Families Coordinating Council, Children's Law Center attorneys, and a former foster youth. The workgroup met on June 21<sup>st</sup> and on July 11<sup>th</sup> to consider the information gathered, examine the RFI responses received, review three existing academy models and another in development, and discuss what approach (including alternatives) might best meet the needs of LA youth. Eight members participated in a visit to San Diego's San Pasqual Academy on July 6<sup>th</sup> and another member visited all three existing academies.

### **Recommendations:**

#### Academy:

- Two residential academies should be established in Los Angeles County. These academies would provide, over time, a positive and stable educational experience for some of the county's foster youth and add a desirable option to currently available educational choices.
- Each academy should be first and foremost a school, with the residential component secondary
- School should provide a rigorous college preparatory curriculum (meeting A-G requirements at a minimum) with extra tutoring available, learning skills instruction, homework assigned on a regular basis, small classes and (hopefully) college scholarships for all graduates
- School should start at the middle school level and, ideally, include grades 6 – 12. Preferably, academy would begin operation with 6<sup>th</sup> and/or 7<sup>th</sup> grades and sequentially add higher grades as the student population advances.
- Should be a public Charter School
- One of these academies would be located in a central, urban location (South LA) and one in a more rural location (Antelope Valley)
- Facility should have an RCL 7 - 9 license
- No county funds should be used for capital expenses and or for operating costs beyond those required for the Title IV E match for foster youth in residence. Contract agency should secure capital and program operation funding, as well as funds for program enhancements.

## Students:

The student population should be comprised of both boarding and day students.

- Boarding Students:
  - Middle and high school age youth who are currently in nonrelative out-of-home care and for whom permanent placement in a family setting is currently unavailable
  - Students would be accepted from group homes with RCL levels up to 12 who are ready to step down to a less intensive program, or from other foster care settings
  - Foster youth who would benefit from a more challenging educational experience not currently available to them
  - Admission preference would be given to students with the potential to succeed academically, but who are not performing up to their ability (i.e. B and C students and/or those who are one or more grade levels behind)
  - Students may have an IEP and may have required special education in the past, but no longer require special day classes
- Day Students:
  - Foster youth living with relatives, kinGAP youth, former boarding school residents who have transitioned into a stable family setting, probation youth, and non-system local community students whose families meet federal poverty guidelines (Title 1 eligible)
- All students should have an interest in pursuing higher education
- Permanency will be aggressively sought for ALL students, using DCFS' P3 program and other efforts. Those who are able to find permanency may continue to attend school as day students.
- Siblings of academy students will be given preference for admission, either as boarding or as day students

## Program Components:

- Boarding school must be a voluntary program. Students would apply for admission to the academy and agree to be full partners in their education
- Residential component of the boarding school would be a 7-day program, but some students would reside on a 5-day basis, depending on their permanency

plans and/or connectedness to a family. Weekend and vacation stays with relatives, potential permanent families, mentors or other appropriate adults would be encouraged and supported

- All students should be connected to a family or have a family experience while at the academy. In addition, mentors should be available for all who could benefit from them
- A strong ILP (Independent Living Program) component for all students, both boarding and day, is essential to prepare youth for success as adults
- A comprehensive career/vocational preparation curriculum should be included, provided through public private partnerships. Local businesses should be encouraged to provide apprenticeships for academy students
- An array of structured and varied activities must be available, including job and life skills experiences, opportunities for social skills development, clubs, sports, interest groups and elective classes (per AB 408). Personal responsibility should be nurtured through required daily chores and community service
- Students should be housed in small residential cottages/homes, each with 10 beds or less. A full-time houseparent/family model (not shifts of staff) should be utilized
- An alumni housing program should be available for academy graduates who are attending college and/or working but require transitional housing, or who need housing during school holidays/breaks

#### Family/Community Involvement:

- Families of students should be heavily involved in as many academy activities as possible through event attendance, participation in classes and field trips and as teacher's aides, instructors or tutors
- Boarding school must be an integral part of the local community. Examples include students performing community service activities, local businesses employing students, community organizations providing sports, arts and cultural activities on and off campus, community residents serving as school staff, tutors and/or mentors, guest lecturers from area private schools, colleges and universities, etc.

#### Conclusion:

- The Board of Supervisors and the Department of Children and Family Services should move forward to develop two residential academies in Los Angeles County, one in South LA and one in the Antelope Valley

- The LA Residential Academy Model, outlined above, should be the model used for these academies
- As Model D came closest to the desired Los Angeles Model, responses which reflect this model should be given strong consideration in the selection process