



**Honorable Chair Lawson-Remer
Vice Chair Montgomery – Steppe
Supervisor Joel Anderson (District 2 overseeing SPA Campus)
& Members of the Board of Supervisors
1600 Pacific Highway
San Diego, CA 92101**

RE: Opposition to Agenda Item No. 35 — San Pasqual Academy Proposed Wind-Down & Request for 90-Day Pause on Recommended Actions (May 19-20, 2026, Board Meetings)

Dear Chairwoman Lawson-Remer and Honorable Supervisors:

Honorable Chairwoman Terra Lawson-Remer
& Members of the Board of Supervisors
1600 Pacific Highway
San Diego, CA 92101

RE: Agenda Item No. 35 — San Pasqual Academy Proposed Wind-Down & Request for 90-Day Continuance
(May 19-20, 2026 Board Meetings)

Dear Chairwoman Lawson-Remer and Honorable Supervisors:

My name is Shane Harris, and I write to you today in my capacity as the newly established Government Affairs Director for Rite of Passage (ROP) Southern California, as well as someone who personally lived within San Diego County's foster care system for over a decade and ultimately emancipated from foster care through San Pasqual Academy.

For many of us who came through the Academy, San Pasqual Academy was not simply a campus or a placement. It was stability. It was continuity. It was belonging. It was one of the few places within the foster care system where young people who had experienced repeated instability were able to build community, maintain educational consistency, and begin rebuilding trust in adults and institutions.

At the same time, I also recognize and acknowledge an important reality: the number of children entering foster care overall has declined over the years, and as a result, placements at San Pasqual Academy have declined as well. There is no question that serious conversations must occur regarding future sustainability, operational structure, and long-term vision for the Academy and the campus.

However, the concern many of us share is not whether conversations about the future should happen — they absolutely should. The concern is that this process now appears to be moving toward immediate action before the public engagement process has been fully completed, analyzed, and meaningfully expanded.

Particularly during National Foster Care Month, this is not the time to rush closure-related actions impacting some of San Diego County's most vulnerable youth.

The original understanding surrounding the County's 180-day listening and engagement process was that County staff would return to the Board with an informational update regarding community input, stakeholder engagement efforts, and data gathered through listening sessions and surveys — not with immediate directives or recommendations initiating a phased wind-down of the Academy.

This month's discussion was supposed to center around what was learned through the listening sessions and community feedback process, not the advancement of closure-related actions.

Many stakeholders participated in this process under the belief that the County was genuinely seeking input regarding the future of the Academy, not building toward a predetermined recommendation. The distinction between an informational report-back and actionable closure directives is substantial, and many in the community feel blindsided by the direction this process has now taken.

The right approach is to:

- Assess the input gathered through surveys and listening sessions
- Continue broader stakeholder outreach and engagement
- Review operational and policy realities transparently
- Explore alternative models and future opportunities
- Then return to the Board on a future date with a thoughtful, data-driven, community-informed proposal regarding the future of the Academy

Additionally, serious concerns exist regarding the breadth, transparency, and effectiveness of the public engagement process itself.

The Children's Initiative, under the leadership of Sandra McBrayer, was contracted to help facilitate stakeholder listening sessions surrounding the future of San Pasqual Academy. However, there was no meaningful broad-based outreach effort conducted among many key stakeholder groups, including but not limited to:

- Former foster youth and alumni of San Pasqual Academy
- Community leaders
- Constituents throughout San Diego County
- Regional civic leaders
- Advocacy organizations
- Educational stakeholders
- Former caregivers and long-term supporters of the Academy

Equally concerning is the fact that these listening sessions were not broadly promoted through the County News Center, major public media channels, or other meaningful countywide communications platforms that would have allowed for wider public awareness and authentic community participation.

If the County's true goal was to genuinely listen to the public and gather meaningful feedback regarding the future of San Pasqual Academy, the outreach process should have reflected that commitment.

To be fair, I do want to acknowledge that Alfredo Aguirre Guardado appeared to make a more sincere effort to at least engage stakeholders and create space for dialogue rather than pursuing the type of abrupt closure announcements that many of us experienced during the 2021 efforts involving the Academy. However, the shortcomings of the overall public engagement process ultimately rest with the contractor and structure established to conduct that outreach.

Many current members of this Board were not serving in 2021 when San Pasqual Academy previously faced closure-related efforts tied to state and county foster care reforms. That period created enormous instability and fear among foster youth, alumni, and community stakeholders. It also exposed significant flaws in the County's approach toward determining the future of the Academy without sufficiently centering the voices of those most directly impacted.

The 2021 process became deeply divisive because many people felt decisions were being made about foster youth rather than with foster youth.

Unfortunately, many of those same concerns are resurfacing today.

Just weeks ago, I personally visited the Academy during the alumni gathering and spent time speaking directly with foster youth currently residing on campus. Several of those young people expressed that they believed discussions surrounding the future of the Academy involved possible "reimagining" concepts and campus improvements — not an impending closure process.

That disconnect alone should deeply concern this Board.

Young people living at San Pasqual Academy deserve transparency, clarity, and trauma-informed communication during any discussion regarding their future. They should never feel as though life-changing decisions are unfolding around them without a full understanding of what is being proposed.

Another major concern that has not been sufficiently addressed in the County's proposed wind-down discussions is the future of San Pasqual Academy's longstanding Grandparent Program and the senior volunteers who have dedicated years — and in some cases decades — of their lives to supporting foster youth on campus.

For more than two decades, San Pasqual Academy's "Grandparents" have served as surrogate family members, mentors, tutors, and trusted adult figures for foster youth residing at the Academy. Many of these individuals have attended graduations, helped youth with homework, taught life skills, celebrated birthdays and milestones, and provided emotional support to young people who often lacked consistent family connections elsewhere in the foster care system.

For countless foster youth, these grandparents were not simply volunteers. They became family.

Yet despite the significant role this program has played in the culture and emotional stability of the Academy, there appears to be no clear transition, support, relocation, or continuity plan publicly outlined for these individuals should the County move forward with winding down the campus.

That absence of planning is deeply concerning.

Any serious conversation regarding the future of San Pasqual Academy must also include serious consideration of the human impact on the grandparents, mentors, longtime caregivers, and campus supporters who helped build the very community many foster youth came to rely upon.

Before any permanent decisions are made, I respectfully urge this Board to direct County staff to assess:

- The long-term future of the Grandparent Program
- Potential housing or relocation impacts affecting grandparents connected to the campus
- Opportunities to preserve mentorship and intergenerational support systems for foster youth
- Ways to incorporate these longstanding volunteers and caregivers into future planning discussions regarding the campus

The relationships foster youth built with these grandparents cannot simply be treated as operational details within a transition plan. They are part of the emotional foundation and identity of San Pasqual Academy itself.

I respectfully urge the Board of Supervisors to consider the following recommendations before taking any action related to the proposed wind-down or closure of San Pasqual Academy:

- 1. Approve a minimum 90-day continuance of any closure-related action or directives involving San Pasqual Academy.**
- 2. Conduct expanded and transparent public engagement sessions facilitated directly by the County, the Chief Administrative Office, community partners, former foster youth leaders, and independent stakeholders with broad public notice and meaningful outreach.**
- 3. Establish a formal stakeholder advisory working group that includes current and former foster youth, alumni, caregivers, educational leaders, community organizations, grandparents connected to the campus, and regional stakeholders to help guide recommendations regarding the future of the Academy and campus.**
- 4. Require an independent assessment of alternative operational models, campus reconfiguration opportunities, regional partnerships, modernization strategies, and long-term sustainability options before any closure-related action is considered by the Board.**
- 5. Direct County staff to establish and publicly present a transition and continuity plan addressing the future of the Academy's Grandparent Program and the senior volunteers who have served foster youth on campus for decades.**
- 6. Every county supervisor is the parent to the kids in foster care and should treat the job as such. This is why my final proposed recommended action is that every Supervisor should visit the Academy like Supervisor Paloma Aguirre took the time to do. This decision pertaining to these youths' lives and the future of the 238 acres needs to be seen and felt by County Supervisors directly not staff or any other party. This should happen before any permanent decision of a wind down takes place.**

San Pasqual Academy has never been a perfect institution. No foster care placement model is. However, for many young people like me who experienced instability throughout childhood, the Academy represented one

of the few environments where we experienced consistency, structure, peer community, mentorship, and hope.

As someone who lived this experience firsthand, I respectfully ask this Board to proceed with caution, transparency, humility, and genuine community engagement before making irreversible decisions regarding the future of San Pasqual Academy.

The youth impacted by these decisions deserve nothing less.

I can be reached at [REDACTED] or via email at [REDACTED].

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Shane Harris". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized "H" and a long, sweeping underline.

Shane Harris
Government Affairs Director – Rite of Passage Southern California
Founder & CEO – S Harris Communications
Former Foster Youth & San Pasqual Academy Alumnus

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ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, GROWTH,
AND HOUSEHOLD IMPACT
HEALTH
HIGHER EDUCATION
BUDGET SUBCOMMITTEE NO. 3 ON
EDUCATION FINANCE

May 18, 2026

San Diego County Board of Supervisors
1600 Pacific Highway
San Diego, CA 92101

RE: OPPOSE Agenda Item #35 — INITIATE TRANSITION OF SAN PASQUAL ACADEMY (ACADEMY)

Dear Honorable Board of Supervisors:

As the State Assemblymember for this region and the Chair of the Assembly Education Committee, I am writing to formally request that the Board pause any final decisions regarding the transition and wind-down of San Pasqual Academy (SPA) for 90 days. As we recognize National Foster Care Month this May, we are reminded of our shared responsibility to provide the most stable and supportive environments possible for youth who have experienced significant disruption.

The 238-acre San Pasqual Academy campus represents a unique opportunity to address gaps in the foster care system, serving as a multipurpose hub for youth-focused support and education. We can build upon SPA's proven foundations, such as:

- **Exceptional Academic Outcomes:** Protecting a model that achieved a 100% graduation rate in the 2024–25 school year and provides "A-G" aligned coursework for CSU/UC eligibility.
- **Specialized Staffing:** Leveraging a team that already includes credentialed education specialists, counselors, and trauma-informed professionals.
- **Expansion of Services:** Aligning with community feedback to explore intensive behavioral health programs and diversified housing models, including Short-Term Residential Therapeutic Programs (STRTP) for those needing a higher level of care.

While I recognize the evolving landscape of federal and state foster care policy, it is imperative that we approach the future of this unique specialized asset through a community partnerships lens. The Academy is a specialized County asset designed for youth with complex needs, integrating education, housing, and health in an environment that traditional school placements often cannot replicate. To that end, I specifically request that the San Diego County Board of Supervisors convene a group of key stakeholders, including the San Pasqual Academy Foundation, San Diego County Office of Education (SDCOE), my office, as well as other stakeholder groups, such as the YMCA, in order to explore all viable solutions.

The urgency of this convening cannot be overstated. The next 90 days present a critical window for the Board, the SDCOE, and my office to work collaboratively on behalf of our most marginalized youth — not to wind down this asset, but to reimagine its full potential.

The funding challenges the Academy faces are structural, rooted in current usage structure and a state pupil-based model not designed for specialized, small-enrollment schools, rather than a failure of the program itself. The solution is to modernize our support systems, not eliminate a program that is working for our most vulnerable youth. Some of the cost savings projected in the proposal are actually cost shifting since the care of foster youth still falls within County jurisdiction.

While the history of San Pasqual Academy has seen various challenges, our focus today must remain on the future well-being of our students and the potential to serve the region through a broader, sustainable vision. I look forward to working with the Board and the SDCOE to ensure San Pasqual Academy remains a beacon of opportunity for the youth who need it most.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Darshana R. Patel". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being the most prominent.

DR. DARSHANA R. PATEL

State Assemblymember, District 76
Chair, Assembly Education Committee