



COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO

AGENDA ITEM

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

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Fourth District

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Fifth District

DATE: November 18, 2025

24

TO: Board of Supervisors

SUBJECT

INITIATE EFFORTS TO MAXIMIZE RESOURCES AT THE SAN PASQUAL ACADEMY (DISTRICTS: ALL)

OVERVIEW

San Pasqual Academy (Academy), developed on 238 acres of land, opened in 2001 as the first residential education campus in the United States designed for foster youth. Licensed by California Department of Social Services (CDSS), the Academy and property are managed by the County of San Diego (County) Health and Human Services Agency, Child and Family Well-Being (CFWB) Department. The campus was designed to provide an alternative placement option for Juvenile Court dependents ages 12-17 and Non-Minor Dependents up to age 19. When the Academy was established, the County provided services to help more than 8,000 youth in out-of-home care, which included over 2,000 youth ages 12-17. At that time, due to high demand for campus-based environments for youth and with CDSS supporting congregate care, the rural all-services approach was considered visionary in designing a resource in support of foster youth.

Within the last decade, federal and State legislation has shifted the statutory requirements for keeping children safely in family settings and reducing reliance on congregate care. On October 11, 2015, Assembly Bill 403, also known as the Continuum of Care Reform Act (CCR), was signed into law. CCR identifies home-based settings with resource families as the best placement option for youth, reduces the use of congregate care, and eliminates the use of licensed group homes as a placement option. A core tenet of CCR, and the foundation of CFWB's Kin-First culture, is the belief that foster youth experience better outcomes when placed with relatives or trusted adults, reducing the need for congregate care and ensuring they remain connected to family, culture and community. Additionally, the Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) enacted in 2018, reformed CFWB policy to prioritize keeping children safely with their families and reducing unnecessary placement into foster care.

Among CFWB efforts to place children in homelike settings, the department partnered with families and communities to strengthen preventive services and expanded efforts in creating a Kin-First culture. Subsequently, the number of children in care and use of congregate care settings has been reduced significantly. As recent legislative shifts emphasize prevention and family-based care, it is time to reengage advocates, youth, educators and other experts in health and social services to maximize the utilization and impact of the resources at the Academy. The Academy

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was originally created during a time when youth were entering foster care at higher rates than home-based placements could accommodate, resulting in the prevalent and necessary use of congregate care settings. It was also during a time when educational supports and resources for youth transitioning out of foster care were very limited. The continued changing landscape today provides an opportunity to revisit the current model and usage of the Academy Campus.

Today's actions will authorize an in-depth and broad engagement with experts, advocates and community leaders on best options for serving the needs of foster youth housed at the Academy.

This item supports the County vision of a just, sustainable, and resilient future for all, specifically those communities and populations in San Diego County that have been historically left behind, as well as our ongoing commitment to the regional *Live Well San Diego* vision of healthy, safe, and thriving communities. This effort reflects a commitment to aligning with the Board of Supervisors' priorities and the current needs of youth in care as well as other needs that may exist for the broader community.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

1. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer, or designee, to conduct stakeholder engagement including current and former foster youth, Child and Family Well-Being staff, Juvenile Court partners, education partners, Child and Family Strengthening Advisory Board, community organizations that support foster youth, and other key stakeholders that support foster youth and San Pasqual Academy (Academy), to develop recommendations for best serving foster youth, maximizing the use of the Academy campus, and ensuring fiscal sustainability of foster youth programming.
2. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer, or designee, to return to the Board in 180 days with recommendations for consideration to ensure the Academy campus can benefit individuals and families in the region to the greatest extent possible while also ensuring sustainable programs.

EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT

The County of San Diego (County) Health and Human Services Agency, Child Family Well-Being (CFWB) partners with families and the community to prevent, reduce, and respond to child abuse and maltreatment and enhance family strengthening efforts. Youth who enter foster care because they cannot safely remain with their biological families often have histories of severe, complex trauma and face significant mental and behavioral health challenges that require intensive, specialized care and interventions. On average, CFWB has 1,400 children ages 0–17 in out-of-home care receiving services, supports, and interventions designed to align with each child's level of need.

Historically, San Pasqual Academy (Academy) has served as a unique placement option within the continuum of care, specifically designed for older foster youth. In Fiscal Year 2024-25, the Academy served 49 youth. Over the past decade, the Academy has consistently achieved a graduation rate of 97%, with 100% of senior students graduating in June 2025. However, within the last decade, federal and State legislation has shifted the statutory requirements for keeping children safely with families and reducing reliance on congregate care.

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SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT STATEMENT

Today's actions support the County of San Diego (County) sustainability Goal #1, to engage communities in meaningful ways and sustainability Goal #2, to provide just and equitable access to County services. Through broad engagement and a participatory process, the County will commit to including those most impacted to identify service gaps and help shape a trauma-informed, culturally responsive system. This effort aligns with broader goals to expand system capacity and provide foster youth with equitable access to high-quality placements in the least restrictive settings. By investing in the resilience of these youth, the County is not only strengthening them as individuals but also empowering them to become future leaders within their families and communities. A community-centered approach, grounded in expanded outreach and inclusive engagement, will remain central throughout this process.

FISCAL IMPACT

There is no new fiscal impact associated with this action. There may be future fiscal impacts, and those impacts will be considered upon return to the Board. There will be no change in net General Fund costs and no additional staff years.

BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT

N/A

ADVISORY BOARD STATEMENT

On January 24, 2025, the Child and Family Strengthening Advisory Board received an update on San Pasqual Academy. This item will be presented as an informational item at the next regular meeting on January 23, 2026.

BACKGROUND

San Pasqual Academy (Academy), developed on 238 acres of land, opened in 2001 as the first-in-the-nation residential education campus designed to meet the needs of youth in the foster care system. The Academy is licensed by the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) Community Care Licensing Division, under the administration of the County of San Diego (County) Health and Human Services Agency, Child and Family Well-Being (CFWB) Department. The Academy serves as an alternative placement option for dependents of the Juvenile Court, ages 12–17 and Non-Minor Dependents up to age 19. Since its inception, the Academy has served over 1,000 youth.

Through a unique partnership of public and private agencies the Academy students were provided with a seamless delivery of services. The Academy provided stable long-term placement, an on-site high school, independent living skills preparation, therapeutic services, work readiness training, extra-curricular activities, family connections and relational permanency and after-care support for Academy graduates. However, given shifting trends in the foster care population, the current model at the Academy is no longer able to keep pace with all the changes at the federal, State, and local levels and those it was originally envisioned to serve.

Legislative Changes

For over a decade, federal and State legislation has prioritized keeping children safely with their families. In 2012, the California Fostering Connections to Success Act allowed eligible youth to

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remain in foster care until age 21 and established more services and support to help young adults transition to adulthood. The 2015 Continuum of Care Reform Act (CCR) emphasizes home-based placements with resource families as the best placement option for youth in care, reduces the use of congregate care, and eliminates the use of licensed group homes as a placement option. The 2018 Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) further prioritized family-based care and reduced reliance on foster care placements.

Following discussions on preserving the Academy's unique program within CCR parameters, an updated Program Statement for a three-year Pilot Project for the period of December 1, 2018 through December 31, 2021, was approved by CDSS on August 17, 2018.

On February 8, 2021, CFWB was notified by CDSS that the Academy's three-year Pilot Project supporting Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) would terminate effective October 1, 2021 rather than December 31, 2021. The decision was due to the Academy's current educational-based residential program not meeting foster care requirements under FFPSA and CCR.

At the San Diego County Board of Supervisors' (Board) direction on March 16, 2021 (12), the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) requested an extension of the MOU from CDSS to continue the Academy operations as a Group Home License through June 30, 2022. CDSS granted the extension on May 3, 2021, which coincided with the end of the 2021-2022 school year subject to several conditions.

To align with federal and State requirements and address foster care needs, CFWB engaged the community to co-create plans for the Academy campus's future use. The input received shaped recommendations presented to the Board on January 25, 2022 (19). At this meeting, the Board approved key actions to transform the Academy into a continuum of care, multipurpose campus serving youth in foster care.

As a direct result of the Board's action, CFWB immediately engaged in planning and activities in support of placement types that have potential to coexist on the Academy campus. On August 29, 2022, Rite of Passage Adolescent Treatment Centers and School, Inc. (Rite of Passage) was selected to be the new service provider. Subsequently, on October 25, 2022 (23), the Board authorized a competitive solicitation for the Short-Term Residential Therapeutic Programs (STRTP) and the Transitional Housing Program (THP) at the campus. Rite of Passage was selected to provide an integrated STRTP at the Academy.

Academy Placements Since Inception

When the Academy opened in 2001, there were over 8,000 children in care for Fiscal Year (FY) 2001-02. During that fiscal year, over 2,300 youth in care were between the ages of 12-17 (Academy eligible age). For FY 2024-25, there were approximately 2,320 youth in care and only 555 between the ages of 12-17. However, many are not eligible for Academy placement due to factors such as being in relative care placements, having behavioral and mental health needs, or youth exercising their right to decline the Academy as a placement option.

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In FY 2024-25, among the 555 youth who were eligible by age for the Academy:

- 379 (68%) were placed with resource families including kin, guardians, foster parents, or Foster Family Agency homes
- 95 (17%) had higher-level care needs that necessitate placement other than the Academy.
- 49 (<9%) were placed at the Academy
- 32 (<6%) of the remaining youth were in other appropriate settings, including transitional housing, Polinsky Children's Center, or pending placement as individualized needs are assessed

Fiscal Year 2001-02	Fiscal Year 2024-25
• 8,450 out of home care	• 2,320 out of home care
• 2,348 eligible youth	• 555 eligible youth
• 77 placed at the Academy	• 49 placed at the Academy

Over the past two decades, enrollment at the Academy has steadily declined, reflecting CFWB's broader focus on prevention and family-first placements. The number of youth placed at the Academy has drastically decreased since 2001. Between July 1, 2001 and June 30, 2025, the Academy served over 1,000 youth with the peak year being 195 unduplicated youth served in FY 2009-10.

Current Academy Limitations

The Academy is currently facing several challenges that limit its ability to meet the needs of youth in care. A higher percentage of children entering the system today have more complex care needs, including histories of severe, complex trauma and significant mental and behavioral health challenges. Those needs require higher levels of support, which the Academy was not designed for and is not currently equipped to provide. The enrollment decline affects the on-site school, restricting the educational and developmental opportunities available to students which detracts from a sense of normalcy that community-based schools provide. As of June 30, 2025, 49 youth are placed at the Academy, of whom:

- 16% attend school off-campus
- 14% have graduated
- 16% are in care and in process of reunifying with family
- Approximately 87% have identified permanent connections, including parents, siblings, relatives, or other significant adults

CFWB is continuing its ongoing efforts to identify youth who may be appropriate for the Academy. Concurrently, it acknowledges all the changes over the past two decades and supports reengaging stakeholders and other experts to bring the community's voice forward and identify recommendations for the Board's consideration to ensure this tremendous resource can benefit individuals and families in the region to the greatest extent possible while also ensuring sustainable programs.

Staff will return to the Board with a report on stakeholder engagement results, options for Academy utilization, and other Board approvals as required to ensure the County aligns community needs, available resources, and best practices.

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Today's actions request the Board to direct the CAO, or designee, to conduct stakeholder engagement to develop recommendations for best serving foster youth and return in 180 days with recommendations for consideration to ensure the Academy campus can benefit individuals and families in the region to the greatest extent possible while ensuring sustainable programs.

LINKAGE TO THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO STRATEGIC PLAN

Today's action aligns with the County of San Diego 2025-2030 Strategic Plan initiatives of Sustainability (Economy and Resiliency), Equity (Health and Housing), and Community (Engagement, Quality of Life, Communications, and Partnership) as well as the regional *Live Well San Diego* vision. This is accomplished by providing equitable opportunities for youth to access a continuum of placements and services that meet their unique and diverse needs and achieve healthy and successful outcomes.

Respectfully submitted,



FOR

EBONY N. SHELTON
Chief Administrative Officer

ATTACHMENT(S)
N/A