

# **FOSTER CARE CIVIC SUCCESS OPERATING AT 50 PERCENT OCCUPANCY...WHY?**

## ***SUMMARY***

One of the goals of the San Diego County Board of Supervisors in founding San Pasqual Academy (Academy) was to provide foster care children a stable, caring home for those who could not return to their parents or guardians. The Academy is a proven success. Unlike other alumni of foster care placements, most graduates of the Academy go on to college.

Four previous San Diego County Grand Juries<sup>1</sup> and four San Diego County Juvenile Justice Commissions<sup>2</sup> (CJJC) have noted the impressive, quality programs available to the student body. Their reports strongly support increasing the enrollment of San Pasqual Academy to its full capacity of 184. Despite these recommendations, enrollment has remained consistently below capacity.

The 2016/2017 San Diego County Grand Jury (Grand Jury) found there are significantly different outcomes of foster care alumni from San Pasqual Academy and other adult foster care alumni. This study confirmed the prior independent deliberative bodies' findings.

The Grand Jury found the San Diego County Board of Supervisors made a sound investment of taxpayer's dollars in the Academy. San Pasqual Academy returns this investment by producing productive citizens and taxpayers. National research on foster care indicates a disturbing percentage of alumni from the foster care system enter a cycle of dependency on public and private welfare programs.

The Grand Jury recommends San Pasqual Academy be fully utilized to better serve children who have been abused or neglected.

## ***INTRODUCTION***

The magnitude of negative outcomes of adults who as children were in the foster care system made this a relevant investigation for the Grand Jury. The investigation's focus was on the success, as adults, that the alumni of these placements achieved.

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<sup>1</sup> Grand Jury reports: 02/03 Foster Care Improving?: County Leads the Way Toward Expanding Interagency Cooperation; 05/06 San Pasqual Academy; 09/10 Transitional Age Youth: Navigating a Difficult Course to Independent Living; 13/14 The Education and Rehabilitation of At-Risk Juveniles: An Opportunity for Positive Change.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.sdcourt.ca.gov/jjereports> (accessed July 27, 2016).

## ***PROCEDURE***

The Grand Jury reviewed the works of eminent professionals in the field of social services relating to foster care. Additionally, the Grand Jury reviewed the prior reports relative to foster child care in the County of San Diego. Building on this foundation, the Grand Jury followed with interviews and field visits:

- Visited “Voices for Children,” a nonprofit organization that advocates for foster care children and trains Court Appointed Special Advocates for Children (CASAs)
- Met with staff from the County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency
- Visited and toured San Pasqual Academy
- Reviewed County of San Diego Grand Jury Reports
- Reviewed County of San Diego Juvenile Justice Commission reports
- Interviewed staff members of San Pasqual Academy
- Reviewed California Foster Care Legislation
- Interviewed members of the County of San Diego Behavioral Health staff
- Interviewed staff members of the County Child Welfare Service

## ***DISCUSSION***

A recent article in the *San Diego Union-Tribune*<sup>3</sup> noted that foster care alumni graduating from four-year universities is a rare event. It noted, “Studies also show that 50 percent of foster youths receive a high school diploma, and 10 percent of former foster youth attend college. Of these, 3 percent will graduate.” The Grand Jury investigation focused on what could be done to improve this academic success rate in San Diego County.

The Union Tribune article was just one of many reports that documented unfulfilled lives of foster care alumni. It is clear that there are competing philosophies on what is best for foster children. “There has always been, and will always be, a tension in the child welfare field between child saving and family preservation.”<sup>4</sup>

Dennis Lepak, from the Contra Costa County California Probation Department, testified in 1988 to the House of Representatives,<sup>5</sup> and his testimony puts the issue bluntly. Lepak said, “Inappropriate placements and a lack of needed services are partly to blame. ... Children are not prepared to return to families, nor are they provided with a specialized educational and vocational training they need to survive after they become 18.” As a result, Lepak said, “They become the new homeless.” A 1991 federal study of former

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<sup>3</sup> Gary Warth, “Weekend of commencement begin: CSUSM Graduates among first to attend foster youth program,” *San Diego Union-Tribune*, May 20, 2016.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas McDonald, Reva Allen, Alex Westerfelt, and Irving Piliavin, “Assessing the Long-Term Effects of Foster Care: A Research Synthesis,” <http://www.irp.wisc.edu/publications/focus/pdfs/foc142g.pdf> (accessed September 21, 2016).

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.liftingtheveil.org/foster14.htm> (accessed September 29, 2016).

foster care alumni found that 20 percent had been homeless and 40 percent were receiving public assistance.<sup>6</sup>

As recently as October 1, 2016, a state-standardized test, administered to California's school children, reported a significant achievement gap in California and San Diego County by foster care children.<sup>7</sup> Overall, the results documented that foster care children demonstrate serious deficiencies in educational achievement. It reinforced the unfortunate conclusions Lepak made years earlier. Experts agree that the single best indicator of becoming a successful adult is graduation from high school.<sup>8</sup> The Grand Jury believes the educational achievement gap of foster care children in the County is a powerful negative predictor of their success as adults and a significant challenge for the Child Welfare Services.

National research on foster care indicates a disturbing percentage; approximately 20 percent to 40 percent of alumni from the foster care system enter a cycle of dependency on public and private welfare programs.<sup>9</sup> It is important to note the outcomes of San Diego County adult foster care alumni are not studied or documented. Therefore, their success as adults is unknown. As a result, the Grand Jury presents national statistics as a surrogate for comparison purposes. The exception is the data provided on San Pasqual Academy.<sup>10</sup>

The Grand Jury visited San Pasqual Academy. Located in North San Diego County, the Academy is surrounded by mountains and orange groves. The Academy's setting projects an impression of stability, a critical issue for foster care children. It is not unusual for foster care children to experience five foster home placements and frequently more.<sup>11</sup> The more placements foster children experience, the more schools they attend with new teachers and curriculum, which adds more instability in an already fragile and traumatized youth. "Foster youth who experience more placements are nearly 15 percent less likely to complete high school when compared to their peers."<sup>12</sup> San Pasqual Academy was founded as a long term residential and educational facility in part to address the issue of stability.

Duke University's Center for Child and Family Policy presented a study highlighting 10 Indicators of Academic Achievement and Youth Success.<sup>13</sup> San Pasqual Academy stresses extracurricular activities among other indicators that are included in the Duke

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid

<sup>7</sup> Maureen Magee, "First look at test scores of foster youth reveals underachievement," *San Diego Union-Tribune*, October 1, 2016.

<sup>8</sup> <http://dukespace.lib.duke.edu/dspace/handle/10161/7480> (accessed November 3, 2016).

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.liftingtheveil.org/foster14.htm> (accessed 29 September 2016).

<sup>10</sup> San Pasqual Academy information, County of San Diego Child Welfare Service, October 6, 2015.

<sup>11</sup> <http://promises2kids.org/facts-figures/> (accessed October 11, 2016).

<sup>12</sup> Ibid

<sup>13</sup> <http://dukespace.lib.duke.edu/dspace/handle/10161/7480> (accessed November 3, 2016).

study. The Academy offers a wide range of extracurricular activities that addresses the high correlation of extracurricular participation to positive life outcomes. The students participate in an extensive variety of sports, teamwork learning, and collaborating with others for a common goal. Participation in student government, clubs, and performing arts all contribute to a foundation for adulthood. Centering the youth is critical, given the traumatic experience of early neglect or abuse.

The Academy provides an all-around menu of services aimed at remediating the adverse effects that these foster care children experience. The mission of the San Pasqual Academy is to educate while providing a homelike structure aimed at producing healthy and successful adults. One result of the low enrollment in the San Pasqual Academy High School is a student-teacher ratio where additional students could maximize the special skills of these dedicated professional educators. The students live in small family-like groups with “Grandparents,” retired, caring adults who provide a positive adult role model. The Juvenile Justice Commission report of 2013<sup>14</sup> stated its observations succinctly: “SPA [San Pasqual Academy] continues to be a model facility delivering essentially full service, wrap-around services in a residential setting to foster youth with an eye to providing integrated living skills (social, occupational/vocational, academic), trauma-informed care and an embedded residential education program to residents.”

The Juvenile Justice Commission report<sup>15</sup> reached the same conclusion as the 2016/2017 Grand Jury: “SPA [San Pasqual Academy] is among the most successful academic settings under the CJJC’s umbrella, and when combined with internships and work-readiness programming may be the best hope for high-risk youth both on the child welfare and juvenile delinquency side.”

The work-readiness program provided at the Academy contributes to the impressive results noted in the following statistics, which compare alumni from San Pasqual and other post-foster care alumni. The San Diego Workforce Partnership unit located at the Academy provides intern opportunities that expose students to the world of work where individual effort translates to a successful introduction to job readiness.

San Diego County Foster Care Statistics:<sup>16</sup>

- In fiscal year 2013-2014, there were 40,065 reports of abuse and/or neglect made to the Child Welfare Services Hotline, which represents 75,862 children total.
- As of July 2014 in San Diego County 3,062 children were in out-of-home care:
  - 44% Kinship care
  - 51% Non-kinship care
    - foster family homes placement

<sup>14</sup>

[http://www.sdcourt.ca.gov/pls/portal/docs/page/sdcourt/juvenile3/juvenilejusticecommission/jjcreports/spa\\_insp\\_2013.pdf](http://www.sdcourt.ca.gov/pls/portal/docs/page/sdcourt/juvenile3/juvenilejusticecommission/jjcreports/spa_insp_2013.pdf) (accessed February 6, 2017)

<sup>15</sup> Ibid

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.speakupnow.org/foster-care-statistics-resources> (accessed August 17, 2016).

- guardian and court specified homes
- foster family agency homes
- shelter care
- 2% Other (e.g., trial visits with parents, non-foster care placement)
- 3% Adoptions pending /finalized

The following metrics bring into focus the potential to dramatically change the future of other foster care children by operating the Academy at full enrollment. The Grand Jury believes the comparison between San Pasqual Academy alumni and other foster care alumni make a powerful argument for full-capacity utilization of San Pasqual Academy.

<b>National Foster Care Statistics<sup>17</sup></b> (Unless otherwise noted)	<b>San Pasqual Academy Statistics<sup>18</sup></b> (Unless otherwise noted)
50% of foster children will graduate from high school or obtain a GED. ----- ---- 80.8% of California high school students graduated in 2014. <sup>19</sup>	The Academy high School graduation/GED rate of 92% significantly exceeds the high school graduation/GED rates reported by the Stuart Foundation for other California youth populations.
3% graduate from college. <sup>20</sup>	10% Graduate from college.
Over 33% of all foster teen boys will be incarcerated before age 21. (California average cost of incarceration: \$70,836/yr.). <sup>21</sup>	San Pasqual Academy graduated 337 children over a 14-year period and 0.59% have been incarcerated. <sup>22</sup>
Many young foster care siblings are placed in different homes, resulting in further trauma. <sup>23</sup>	San Pasqual Academy accepts siblings, including those in middle school.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid

<sup>18</sup> Michael J. Lawler et. al., “Comprehensive residential education: A promising model for emerging adults in foster care,” <http://fultext.study/preview/pdf346188.pdf>, (accessed July 13, 2016).

<sup>19</sup> Pat Maio and Maureen Magee, “San Diego County graduation rate is flat after years of increases,” *San Diego Union-Tribune*, April 20, 2015.

<sup>20</sup> Gary Warth, “Weekend of Commencement begins: CSUSM Graduates among first to attend foster youth program,” *San Diego Union-Tribune*, May 20, 2016.

<sup>21</sup> [http://www.lao.ca.gov/PolicyAreas/CJ/6\\_cj\\_inmatecost](http://www.lao.ca.gov/PolicyAreas/CJ/6_cj_inmatecost) (accessed October 12, 2016).

<sup>22</sup> San Pasqual Academy Information, San Diego County Child Welfare Service, October 6, 2016

<sup>23</sup> <http://promises2kids.org/facts-figures/> (accessed October 11, 2016).

10% of former foster youth attend college. <sup>24</sup>	60% of San Pasqual high school graduates have gone to college. <sup>25</sup>
25% of foster children experience PTSD (comparable to the rate of U.S. war veterans), and tend to suffer high rates of debilitating depression and low self-esteem.	The County of San Diego Behavioral Health Services has a presence on campus that can address mental health issues. <sup>26</sup>

The San Diego County Board of Supervisors’ vision for San Pasqual Academy has been more than validated by the documented success achieved by the Academy. San Pasqual’s results in providing healthier, more productive outcomes for foster children are measurable. The statistical differences are dramatic. Bringing San Pasqual Academy’s student body to full capacity would result in full use of the teachers, staff, and physical plant, plus an immeasurable life change for San Diego County foster children.

### ***FACTS AND FINDINGS***

***Fact:*** Multiple San Diego County Grand Juries and San Diego County Juvenile Justice Commissions recommended increased enrollment at San Pasqual Academy.

***Fact:*** On October 12, 2016, student enrollment was at 50 percent of authorized capacity.

***Finding 01:*** Low enrollment underutilizes dedicated teachers and County facilities.

***Fact:*** Student enrollment at San Pasqual Academy has consistently been below the Academy’s authorized capacity of 184.

***Finding 02:*** San Pasqual Academy operating below capacity wastes taxpayer resources and fails to capitalize on the principle of economies of scale.

***Fact:*** National statistics document 50 percent of foster care children will not graduate from high school.

***Fact:*** 19.2 percent of all California high school students in 2015 did not graduate from high school.

***Fact:*** The Academy high school graduation/GED rate of 92 percent significantly exceeds the high school graduation/GED rates for other California public schools.

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<sup>24</sup> Gary Warth, “Weekend of Commencement begins: CSUSM Graduates among first to attend foster youth program,” *San Diego Union-Tribune*, May 20, 2016.

<sup>25</sup> San Pasqual Academy information, San Diego County Child Welfare Service October 6, 2016.

<sup>26</sup> Interview on September 26, 2016, with County of San Diego Behavioral Health Service Staff.

**Fact:** National statistics note that 10 percent of former foster care youth attend college.

**Fact:** 60 percent of San Pasqual high school graduates go on to a two-year or four-year college.

**Fact:** 10 percent of San Pasqual Academy graduates earned a four-year college degree or higher.

**Finding 03:** Increasing the number of foster care children at San Pasqual Academy would result in more foster care children graduating from high school and attending college.

**Fact:** Siblings are difficult to place with the same foster care parents.

**Finding 04:** San Pasqual Academy has a positive effect in keeping families together by accepting siblings from middle school through high school.

### ***RECOMMENDATIONS***

**The 2016/2017 Grand Jury recommends that the San Diego County Board of Supervisors through the Chief Administrative Officer:**

**17-18: Fully use taxpayer resources and improve graduation rates of foster care children in San Diego County by establishing a plan to increase the enrollment of foster care children at San Pasqual Academy to the authorized capacity of 184.**

**17-19: Consider highlighting the San Pasqual Academy student achievements with quarterly progress reports as one of the means used by Child Welfare Services to increase enrollment at San Pasqual Academy in the plan noted above.**

### ***COMMENDATIONS***

The 2016/2017 San Diego County Grand Jury commends the San Diego County Board of Supervisors for its continued support, insight and diligence in making a difference in the lives of the most vulnerable children in the County by its strong support of San Pasqual Academy.

The 2016/2017 San Diego County Grand Jury also commends the Staff of San Pasqual Academy for its excellence in delivering quality curriculum and instructional practices that add successful and contributing members to our country.

### ***REQUIREMENTS AND INSTRUCTIONS***

The California Penal Code §933(c) requires any public agency which the Grand Jury has reviewed, and about which it has issued a final report, to comment to the Presiding Judge of the

Superior Court on the findings and recommendations pertaining to matters under the control of the agency. Such comment shall be made *no later than 90 days* after the Grand Jury publishes its report (filed with the Clerk of the Court); except that in the case of a report containing findings and recommendations pertaining to a department or agency headed by an elected County official (e.g. District Attorney, Sheriff, etc.), such comment shall be made *within 60 days* to the Presiding Judge with an information copy sent to the Board of Supervisors.

Furthermore, California Penal Code §933.05(a), (b), (c), details, as follows, the manner in which such comment(s) are to be made:

- (a) As to each grand jury finding, the responding person or entity shall indicate one of the following:
  - (1) The respondent agrees with the finding
  - (2) The respondent disagrees wholly or partially with the finding, in which case the response shall specify the portion of the finding that is disputed and shall include an explanation of the reasons therefor.
- (b) As to each grand jury recommendation, the responding person or entity shall report one of the following actions:
  - (1) The recommendation has been implemented, with a summary regarding the implemented action.
  - (2) The recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future, with a time frame for implementation.
  - (3) The recommendation requires further analysis, with an explanation and the scope and parameters of an analysis or study, and a time frame for the matter to be prepared for discussion by the officer or head of the agency or department being investigated or reviewed, including the governing body of the public agency when applicable. This time frame shall not exceed six months from the date of publication of the grand jury report.
  - (4) The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable, with an explanation therefor.
- (c) If a finding or recommendation of the grand jury addresses budgetary or personnel matters of a county agency or department headed by an elected officer, both the agency or department head and the Board of Supervisors shall respond if requested by the grand jury, but the response of the Board of Supervisors shall address only those budgetary or personnel matters over which it has some decision making authority. The response of the elected agency or department head shall address all aspects of the findings or recommendations affecting his or her agency or department.



Comments to the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court in compliance with the Penal Code §933.05 are required from the:

<b><u>Responding Agency</u></b>	<b><u>Recommendations</u></b>	<b><u>Date</u></b>
<b>San Diego County Board of Supervisors</b>	<b>17-18, 17-19</b>	<b>06/28/17</b>