

Superior Court of California
County of Santa Clara



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Superior Court at Santa Clara County Launches Middle School Education Court

*New Juvenile Dependency Specialty Court Dedicated to Improving
Foster Youth's Academic Performance*

SANTA CLARA COUNTY, CALIF– The Superior Court of California at Santa Clara County announces the launch of a specialty court, **the Middle School Education Court** (MSEC). The MSEC seeks to improve the education outcome of middle school foster youth through system-wide collaboration and accountability by bringing all the agencies responsible for the care and education of foster youth under one umbrella: the Court.

The MSEC program compiles current and past school records, conducts needs-assessment evaluations, develops educational plans and protocols in order to support middle school age children in foster care, with the goal of helping them realize their academic potential to attain

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success in their adult life. Expected outcomes of the court include improving overall academic performance, test scores, GPAs and attendance rates of Santa Clara County middle school foster youth.

The Honorable Teresa Guerrero-Daley presides over this new court and leads a team of professionals that includes lawyers, social workers, education specialists, child advocates, school district liaisons and community leaders in implementing the MSEC — the first education-specific dependency court for middle school youth in the nation.

"It is not uncommon for older foster youth to be moved from home to home and thus, often from school to school," said the Honorable Katherine Lucero, Supervising Judge of the Juvenile Dependency Court. "Foster youth don't have the basic benefit of having a single committed adult involved in their education, monitoring their academic progress, attendance, supporting extracurricular activities and ensuring they receive an appropriate education."

"Often, Child Advocates are the only consistent adult in a foster child's life for a period of time," said Vickie Grove, Executive Director for Child Advocates of Silicon Valley. "Our goal is to ensure that all foster youth feel supported in their education, and that they have adults helping them succeed, accompanying them to court and cheering them on."

Statistics show that education outcomes for foster youth, nationally and locally tend to be poor. Compared to youngsters outside the foster care system, foster students are more likely to have higher rates of absenteeism, perform below grade level, be held back in school and twice as likely to drop out of high school.

"We hope this new program brings much needed support in monitoring our foster children's academic progress and attendance to ensure that they do not slip through the cracks," said Supervisor Dave Cortese, President of the County of Santa Clara Board of Supervisors and Chair of the Board's Children, Seniors and Families Committee.

The cost of not succeeding academically is tremendous, to both the foster youth and to society. The MSEC has been established to change the current course that affects the approximately 1,300 children in foster care in Santa Clara County.

"We believe that the MSEC will reinvent court supervision and accountability for foster youth education by breaking down the individual and systemic barriers that stand in the way of foster youth success in school," said Elise Cutini, Executive Director of the Silicon Valley Children's Fund. "We are proud to have played a leading role in launching the nation's first problem solving court dedicated to foster youth education."

According to The National Center for Youth Law, Foster Youth Education Initiative 2010:

- Fewer than 3 percent of foster youth attend a four-year college
- Less than 1 percent of foster youth attains a four-year college degree
- Approximately 25 percent of former foster children experience homelessness
- Around 25 percent of foster youth have been arrested and have spent time incarcerated
- Approximately 33 percent of foster youth receive public assistance
- Unemployment among former foster youth is above 50 percent.

About Middle School Education Court (MSEC)

The MSEC team is comprised of dedicated professionals who serve foster care middle school students, and meet weekly to review each child's school records, education plans and recommendations for implementing the plan. Each child attends a time certain court hearing

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where the MSEC team will review the education plan with the child and will schedule follow-up court hearings. The Research Institute for Foster Youth Initiatives evaluates and identifies the outcomes of this new program.

Middle School Education Court (MSEC) Members:

Superior Court of Santa Clara County

The Honorable Teresa Guerrero-Daley
(408) 695-5173 or (408) 491-4753

TGuerrero-Daley@scscourt.org

Judge Guerrero-Daley is assigned to Juvenile Dependency Court, which handles cases that involve abused and neglected children. One of her duties is to preside over the Middle School Education Court (MSEC). MSEC is offered at both San Jose and Morgan Hill courthouses.

Office of the County Counsel

Karen Heggie
(408) 491-4225

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The Office of the County Counsel represents the County in all legal matters.

Department of Family & Children's Services (DFCS)

Wendy Kinnear-Rausch, Program Manager
(408) 975-5488

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The mission of the Department of Family & Children's Services is to protect children from abuse and neglect, promote their healthy development and provide services to families which preserve and strengthen their ability to care for their children. The Department is responsible for prevention, intervention, advocacy, and public education related to the protection of children and their need for consistency in their care and nurturing. Within DFCS is the Educational Services Unit—a specialized unit of social workers, educational consultants, and attorneys that advocate for the educational rights of children and families involved in the foster care system.

Legal Advocates for Children and Youth (LACY)

Andrew Cain, Supervising Attorney
(408)280-2461

andrewc@lawfoundation.org

LACY will provide seamless advocacy for youth in their juvenile dependency case and in educational settings where appropriate. LACY will have the unique advantage of the relationship with the child and the legal ability to advance the child's educational needs, keeping in mind their own unique challenges, needs, and circumstances. Further, LACY provides systemic advocacy for foster youth in education by participating on Project YEA!, the JET force, and other county-wide educational initiatives. LACY staff will inform the court of educational options for the child and advocate for those opportunities within the dependency case, the education court venue, and in the educational setting.

Child Advocates of Silicon Valley

Vickie Grove, Executive Director
(408) 573-5601

vsgrrove@cadvocates.org

Child Advocates train and support Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) volunteers, who work one-on-one with children, helping to ensure that each child will live in a safe and loving environment. Because volunteers are court-appointed, they can thoroughly research every aspect of a child's case, including meeting teachers, social workers and foster parents. Advocates provide reports to the court so judges can make decisions with clear and accurate information. In addition to providing recommendations to the court, Advocates serve as friends and mentors.

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Dependency Advocacy Center

AnnaLisa M. Chung, Executive Director

(408) 995-0714

achung@sccdac.org

Dependency Advocacy Center provides zealous legal representation to indigent clients in the juvenile dependency system to promote timely reunification and preservation of families in a safe, healthy environment. DAC believes that every parent and child entering the dependency system has a right to be treated with dignity, compassion and respect. DAC supports parents in their efforts to optimize educational outcomes for their children.

Santa Clara County Office of Education

Sonja House, Foster Youth Services Coordinator

(408)453-6956

Sonja_House@sccoe.org

Santa Clara County Office of Education's Foster Youth Services (FYS) program serves children and youth in foster care and homeless situations. Services are designed to address their educational needs by eliminating barriers to school enrollment and by helping to improve educational achievement and outcomes. FYS provides assistance and training to school districts and community partners regarding the various laws that protect the rights of both foster and homeless youth. FYS also works with group home providers, and Juvenile Probation Department (JPD) and the Department of Family and Children's Services (DFCS) and many other agencies and organizations involved in the lives of foster and homeless youth.

Silicon Valley Children's Fund

Elise Cutini, Interim Executive Director

(408)558-5430

elise.cutini@svcf.org

Silicon Valley Children's Fund was formed in 1987 to build a new, critically needed Shelter for the County's abused and neglected children. Since its inception, the Fund has been at the forefront of researching, developing, implementing and evaluating model education projects and programs for foster youth with a focus on three specific objectives.

- Improving foster youth literacy and math skills (K-12)
- Increasing high school graduation rates for foster youth
- Increasing post-secondary graduation rates and successful vocational outcomes for emancipated foster

Dolores Martinez-Peterson

Parent Education Supervisor, Foster Youth Liaison

Alum Rock Union Elementary School District

Office: (408) 243-1980

Dolores.peterson@arUSD.org

Foster Care Liaison responsibilities:

Assist with timely transfer of health and educational records (social services, other school districts, school administration staff and local service agencies), assist in removing barriers preventing foster student from academic success, inform foster parents and students of their educational rights, coordinate district staff training on current policies, laws and legislation related to Foster Youth Services, confer with and serve as a resource regarding services to foster youth, district staff, and other members of the community.

Emily J. Bruce, Ph.D., LCSW

Research Institute for Foster Youth Initiatives (RIFYI)

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The Research Institute for Foster Youth Initiatives (RIFYI) is an organized research unit on the San Jose State University Campus designed to investigate the concerns and issues of foster youth from a multi-disciplinary perspective. The Institute includes faculty from a number of departments, who represent three different SJSU Colleges (College of Education, College of Applied Sciences and Arts, and the College of Social Sciences). The MSEC Collaborative sought the services of the RIFYI in efforts to coordinate, design, and implement their research and evaluation efforts for this unique pilot project.

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