

NEWS

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SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY
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County program employs laid-off school teachers

San Bernardino County Children and Family Services is putting seven laid-off public school teachers back to work preparing foster children to succeed in high school and college.

More than 100 teachers were laid off from public schools in San Bernardino County last year, and 1,000 more may be out of work by this time next year.

The Educational Liaison program is currently staffed by five retired teachers. Once the seven new teachers come on board, the 12 total educational liaisons will serve 2,650 foster children in the county. Children and Family Services projects children in the program will be less likely to create the behavior problems that force foster children into more-expensive group homes, and that the savings will be enough to fund the new positions.

"This program is a win for our foster children, a win for the county budget, and a win for the local economy," said Board of Supervisors Chairman Gary Ovitt, a retired high school teacher. "We're helping more children without spending more taxpayer money, and we're providing work for highly skilled people who became victims of the economic downturn."

The five existing educational liaisons work with high school-aged foster children and assist them in earning their high school diplomas or GEDs and securing financial aid for post-secondary education. The seven new hires will work with elementary and middle school children to prepare them for high school and beyond, reflecting a need to begin working with younger children.

"I felt this was my calling and a good fit for me," said one of the soon-to-be-hired teachers. "I'm excited about working with foster youth one-on-one outside the classroom."

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The new hires have an average of eight years of teaching experience, and also offer backgrounds in foster parenting, child advocacy, social work, school administration, and cultural competency. They were chosen from a field of more than 200 applicants who responded to an ad placed on an education website.

Orange County has used Educational Liaisons for eight years. However, Orange County's Educational Liaisons are under the supervision of the county Superintendent of Schools.

San Bernardino County opted to place them under the supervision of Children and Family Services to increase the individual attention to each child and enable a focused case-management practice. This plan has resulted in a quicker implementation and significant collaboration between Children and Family Services social staff, educational liaisons and the school systems.