

DEPARTMENT: Human Services

DEPARTMENT HEAD: Melody Woosley

COUNCIL DISTRICTS IMPACTED: City Wide

SUBJECT: Briefing on proposed opening of a second NXT Level Youth Opportunity Center in Northside Independent School District (NISD) with Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Funds

SUMMARY:

This item provides a briefing on a proposed interlocal agreement between the Department of Human Services (DHS) and NISD to operate a NXT Level Youth Opportunity Center with Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Funds (ESSER) over a period of three years.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

In September of 2018, the mayor and city council approved almost \$1 million in the FY 2019 adopted budget to open the NXT Level Youth Opportunity Center to serve an estimated 34,000 disconnected youth living in San Antonio.

The NXT Level Youth Opportunity Center opened in February 2019 in partnership with Communities in Schools-San Antonio and Goodwill San Antonio. The center is located at the Frank Garrett Multi-Service Center in the 78207 zip code, which has some of the highest dropout and unemployment rates in the city. Using a trauma-informed approach, the program reconnects youth to school and/or the workplace by addressing the youth's personal barriers to education and work and providing a caring support system throughout their time in the program.

Due to the pandemic, the Aspen Institute and Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas estimate the number of opportunity youth—defined as young people between the ages of 16 to 24 who are neither enrolled in school nor working—in San Antonio has risen from 34,000 pre-pandemic to an estimated 77,000 at the height of the pandemic. While there is no single profile that describes all opportunity youth, this group often has significant life challenges—including lack of access to basic needs such as housing and food, higher rates of disabilities, low literacy levels, justice system involvement, and behavioral health issues.

Although 80% of opportunity youth in San Antonio have at least a high school credential, over 60% of NXT Level participants are high school dropouts. NXT Level participants also are disproportionately people of color with 19% African American (compared to 7% of the San Antonio population) and 51% Hispanic (compared to 63% of the population); 17% of participants are in or have been in foster care; 24% experience homelessness at one point while receiving services; and 6% are involved in the judicial system. Through a whole-person trauma-informed approach, NXT Level coaches collaborate with opportunity youth to create individualized plans that focus on helping them achieve their personal, education, and career goals. The collaboration is focused on reducing disconnected youth by offering wraparound case management and

supportive services for school re-enrollment, high school diploma equivalency completion, vocational and postsecondary training, and career and job readiness preparation.

Since February 2019, NXT Level has served 1,013 young adults. Out of the 710 participants who have received intensive coaching, almost 200 youth have achieved employment and 114 have enrolled in education/workforce programs. Eighteen participants have also enrolled in the AlamoPROMISE program through funding from J.P. Morgan Chase.

Northside Independent School District (NISD) estimates the number of opportunity youth in the NISD catchment area has increased due to student disengagement caused by the challenges of the pandemic. In September 2021, the district proposed funding DHS to open a second NXT Level Youth Opportunity Center in the NISD Family Engagement Center, which is located near Holmes High School and John Jay High School. This area has the most disengaged youth in the NISD district. The district proposes to enter into an interlocal agreement with DHS to operate NXT Level using ESSER funds to support personnel costs, wrap-around support to students, and supplies needed to connect students to education and career opportunities. The United Way of San Antonio also will be providing support to the partnership.

DHS proposes to provide management and oversight of the program and subcontract with Goodwill Industries and Communities in Schools using the coaching, partnership, and structure model currently implemented at NXT Level. Currently, 15% of NXT Level participants reside within NISD. The new center and funding support will expand services to more youth in the NISD area and increase the capacity of the NXT Level at Frank Garrett to serve more inner-city students. Additionally, DHS is developing plans to provide NXT Level services in the east side of San Antonio where 9% of NXT Level participants reside.

ISSUE:

The briefing highlights programming offered by DHS that focuses on youth ages 16 to 24 and its potential partnership with NISD to operate a NXT Level Youth Opportunity Center.

ALTERNATIVES:

This item is for briefing purposes only.

FISCAL IMPACT:

This item is for briefing purposes only.

RECOMMENDATION:

This item is for briefing purposes only.