



Foundation for the Education of Young Women

Fort Worth school board to consider a plan to open all-girls academy

BY DIANE SMITH

dianesmith@star-telegram.com

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FORT WORTH — A million dollars in foundation seed money could help the Fort Worth school district pay for an all-girls academy for grades six to 12 starting in August 2010.

The academy, which would be open to girls throughout the district, would emphasize math, science and technology. It would start with sixth and seventh grades, then add grade levels through the 12th grade.

First-generation, college-bound students from low-income families would be eligible to attend.

Plans for an all-girls academy could move forward tonight if the school board decides to approve a memorandum of understanding between the district and a Dallas-based nonprofit, The Foundation for the Education of Young Women.

The foundation supports four Texas public girls academies, in Dallas, San Antonio, Lubbock and Austin. The foundation, started by entrepreneur Lee Posey and his wife, Sally, would give the Fort Worth district \$1 million to start the school, said Carmyn Neely, the foundation's executive director. The grant would provide \$250,000 a year for four years.

The money would help set up the school and hire a principal during the first year of the grant. A total cost estimate for the project has not been determined. District officials say they will pin down a figure once they get a detailed plan that includes cost, site and staffing.

"We have a year to find the site," said Pat Linares, deputy superintendent for Fort Worth schools.

The school would open for the 2010-11 school year.

Plans include having with 75 students per grade, not exceeding a total of 525 when the school is fully operational, according to the memorandum of understanding.

Neely said the school will prepare young women for college. In addition to the academic rigor, the classes and programs will promote leadership and "comprehensive" personal wellness. Students would be required to wear uniforms.

"We think it is a proven model," Neely said, adding that students at existing academies are flourishing and performing well academically.

At the Irma Rangel Young Women's Leadership School in Dallas, every graduating senior was accepted to multiple colleges, Neely said.

District leaders have discussed single-sex classrooms for several years, and several schools, including Carter-Riverside High, have tried them. More recently, district leaders discussed creating two gender-based academies at Polytechnic High if the state decided to close the school.

Trustee Jean McClung has long supported creating such academies for boys and girls. "I think both of them will learn better and have different behaviors," McClung said.

Neely said that by focusing on girls as they start middle school, educators can establish a culture of academic rigor that can continue throughout high school. "The distractions are fewer," she said. "There is a high level of expectation that these girls will be serious about teaching and learning."

McClung said she and other district leaders visited several single-sex academies in New York and Texas. She said the district plans to establish an academy for boys but hasn't found the money for it. McClung said she worries that boys are losing academic ground and not keeping up with girls. She said she was impressed during a visit to the Eagle Academy for Young Men in South Bronx, N.Y. "They looked wonderful," McClung said. "They acted wonderful."

Linares said the district is pitching the idea of a boys' academy to foundations.

Proposed all-girls academy The school would open for the 2010-11 school year. These are the proposed entrance guidelines:

- A student must be in good academic standing with plans to attend college.
- She must meet state requirements for advancement to the next grade level.
- She must not have chronic attendance or discipline problems.
- She must attend an interview with a parent, caregiver or guardian who will contractually agree to support her efforts to attend college.
- During the interview, the student will take a math and writing diagnostic test to determine grade-level competence.
- Economically disadvantaged students will be given priority for admission.

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The Fort Worth school board will discuss plans for an all-girls academy tonight during a public meeting. The meeting begins at 5:30 p.m. at the school district board complex, 2903 Shotts St. The agenda is available at www.fwisd.org.

Source: Fort Worth school district

DIANE SMITH, 817-390-7675