

## NEWS/Noticias

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Contact: Layla Fry / Southwest Key Programs / 512.462.2181 / 512.669.8999 / lfry@swkey.org

### **TEA Awards Charter School to East Austin College Prep Academy**

*The 6<sup>th</sup> grade campus will be housed at Southwest Key's East Austin Community Development Center*

**AUSTIN, TX — (January 5, 2009)** —The Texas Education Agency (TEA) has granted a charter to the East Austin College Prep Academy. The 6<sup>th</sup> grade campus is scheduled to begin classes August 2009. The charter school will be housed at Southwest Key's East Austin Community Development Center, located at 6002 Jain Lane. This 31,000-square-foot complex was dedicated April 2008 at a cost of \$8 million and serves as the organization's national headquarters. Parent Information Sessions will be held in English and Español on February 28 at 10:00 am at 6002 Jain Lane. Childcare and snacks will be provided.

“The students and parents of East Austin, along with Southwest Key and its stakeholders, are pleased to learn of the Texas State Board of Education's faith in our organization to deliver such an important service to the children and families of the East Austin community,” said Dr. Nellie Cantu, Superintendent of Education at Southwest Key. The East Austin College Prep Academy's application scored the highest in the state this year and was unanimously approved by the members of the State Board of Education, which oversees TEA.

The open enrollment charter school will provide the first middle school class since Allen Junior High closed in the 1980s, leaving the Govalle/Johnston Terrace neighborhood without a middle school. Southwest Key plans to expand the charter school to include a 7<sup>th</sup> grade class in 2010 and an 8<sup>th</sup> grade campus in 2011.

Addressing the needs of Texas' Latino student population is a top priority for Central Texas. According to the U.S. Census, the number of Latino students in U.S. public schools almost doubled between 1990 and 2006, with the percentage of Latinos growing from 12 to 20 percent. It identifies Texas as one of four states where the Latino public school student population is more than 40 percent of all students. In Texas today, approximately 116,000 students are educated at charter schools, while 16,000 students



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remain on waiting lists. Although 16 charter school applications reached the final round this year, only eight charters were awarded by the TEA this year.

“This new school will be based on the highly successful YES Academy model in Houston, which was just named one of the top 100 High Schools in America according to US News and World Report,” says Katie H. Howell, Executive Director of the Resource Center for Charter Schools. “Even though charter schools make up only 2% of Texas Public Schools, they make up 20% of the best high schools in Texas. We applaud East Austin College Prep Academy for creating a partnership with residents of East Austin and providing quality choice in education.”

According to Southwest Key, addressing the needs of Latino students will benefit the Austin community and public schools in many ways. By using Southwest Key as a culturally relevant resource, the East Austin College Prep Academy is in a position to help the area’s high school students raise their test scores, receive valuable assistance in preparing students and their families for higher education, and improve employment opportunities.

“This 6<sup>th</sup> grade charter school fills a void that has existed in East Austin since Allen Junior High closed, leaving this neighborhood without a middle school,” said Dr. Cantu. “This charter is the result of a growing partnership between Southwest Key and the residents of East Austin that was established to address a void that has existed for too long,” said Dr. Cantu. Susana Almanza, longtime East Austin advocate and Martha Cotera sit on the board of the new charter school.

Southwest Key has been preparing for its charter school role for several years by establishing a rigorous and relevant project-based curriculum and constructing a school facility equipped with state of the art instructional equipment. Southwest Key currently operates four alternative schools in the state, including one in Travis County. Southwest Key’s AMD Community Technology Center is currently available to neighboring Eastside Memorial students and parents, as well as the entire East Austin community for tutoring, homework, internet browsing, workforce and communication skills building, and employment preparation. Southwest Key has also partnered with the Boys & Girls Clubs of the Capital Area to house one of its clubs, which is conveniently located a few steps away from Eastside Memorial at Johnston High School. The Boys & Girls Club at Southwest Key provides after-school tutoring, computer classes, recreation, leadership development, and a variety of cultural enrichment programs. Southwest Key’s College Connections Program, which opened in August 2007 as a result of a private grant, guides 20 local



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high school juniors, including students from Eastside Memorial at and their parents, through college preparation and application processes and provides tutoring, TAKS prep, college visits, mentoring, and educational advocacy.

**About Southwest Key Programs:**

Southwest Key Programs is a national nonprofit organization headquartered in Austin, Texas. It has a creative and diverse staff of over 1,000 employees with a mission to improve the quality of life for children through culturally competent education, community development, and youth and family services. In 2008, Southwest Key was formally accredited by the Council on Accreditation, one of the world's leading human service accrediting agencies. Southwest Key's East Austin Community Development Center now serves as a launching pad for increasing the educational attainment and employability of East Austin residents, leading to higher paid employees, increased tax revenues and increased civic and economic engagement of residents.

For more information, visit [www.swkey.org](http://www.swkey.org).

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