



\$58-Million Plan to Rebuild Skid Row's 9th Street Elementary and Add Middle School

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The 9th Street Elementary campus currently consists of 100% portable bungalows. They would be replaced by a new \$58-million facility.

DOWNTOWN LOS ANGELES — 35-year-old portable bungalows could soon give way to a new \$58-million facility at Downtown's 9th Street Elementary.

The Los Angeles Unified School District and family service organization [Para Los Ninos \(PLN\)](#) are nearing final agreement on a plan in which the district would construct two new schools on the site: a 450-seat elementary to be operated by LAUSD and a 405-seat middle school operated by PLN.

The 9th Street Elementary campus, located on the south edge of Skid Row at 9th and Towne, has seen little work since it opened in 1984. The bungalows average 35-years-old, most dating from the site's previous use as a special education high school. LAUSD's "Facilities Condition Index" gives the campus a score of 74%. Anything over 30% is considered critical.

The project would provide 855 seats, nearly double what is on the site today. The two schools would share certain core facilities, and the project would also provide for a health center to be operated by PLN. The middle school would take in students from both the 9th Street elementary and from PLN's Charter Elementary School.

The LAUSD Board of Education approved PLN as the middle school operator on July 14, along with a \$15 million budget for pre-construction activities. This afternoon will vote to choose the 9th Street campus as the preferred site for the project.

Design activities are underway as the district and PLN complete contract negotiations. Current timetables list a construction start in the fall of 2011, with the new facility completed in the fall of 2013.

Elena Stern, PLN Vice President for Communications & External Affairs, said that the organization's "holistic and integrated approach" to providing physical and mental health services at its school sites was a key part of what made the partnership attractive to the district.

"The model [of providing health and wellness services on-site] could be a national model," said Stern.

It was LAUSD that contacted PLN about locating its middle school on the site. PLN Charter Middle School had opened in the fall of 2008, sharing space at the organization's Charter Elementary School on 7th, east of Alameda. The search for a permanent home had been a frustrating one, said Stern. "We had looked everywhere," she said, but the organization had been unable to reach a deal on a site within its parameters.

This year, the school moves to a new home in the World Trade Center at 3rd and Figueroa, utilizing space made available when Green Dot's Oscar de la Hoya Animo Charter High School moved to its new campus in East L.A.

Under the terms of the project, LAUSD will build both school facilities, and PLN will lease the middle school campus. The organization is responsible for raising \$12 million of the \$43 million construction budget, but that task was made significantly easier when Board of Education President Monica Garcia committed \$4 million in funding from her office. PLN plans to look for state Proposition 1D funds, private donations and foundation support to find the remaining \$8 million.

PLN is no stranger to the 9th Street school, having operated after-school services for the campus since it opened. The organization was founded not far from the site, opening its doors in response to a 1979 L.A. Times article chronicling the plight of children on Skid Row. Today the non-profit operates at 27 sites, including seven preschools, the elementary school and the middle school.

The existing 9th Street site will be slightly enlarged by the project, expanding to take in the full block with LAUSD's purchase of a lot on the corner of 8th and Stanford. According to LAUSD documents, the school currently has an enrollment of 337 students, with 161 coming from the surrounding resident area and the rest brought in from overcrowded facilities.

While the current 9th Street Elementary is only 25-years-old, the site it sits on has been a school for over 100 years.

On November 2, 1889, the City's Board of Education voted to build an eight-room schoolhouse at 9th and Stanford, at the time in the middle of a largely-residential neighborhood. On March 14, 1890, the L.A. Times reported in its "City Briefs" column that the structure was "rapidly approaching completion." New work was done in 1925 and in the 1930s, but those structures have since been torn down.

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