

# Schools, courts should save Alder Academy

The Seattle Public Schools must work with King County juvenile court leaders to come up with a plan that saves the Alder Academy.

Seattle Times Editorial

SEATTLE Public Schools must decide soon the fate of the Alder Academy, a school for troubled youths located in the King County Juvenile Detention Center.

A \$210 million King County voter-approved levy is paying to replace the complex's aging facilities, but that will not include the school.

There are two schools on the center's grounds. One located inside the juvenile jail, serving incarcerated youth, is required by federal and state education laws and will be rebuilt by the levy.

The Alder Academy is part of the district's Interagency Academy, serving students who have been jailed or kicked out of school or are homeless, pregnant or learning disabled.

Currently, Alder sits just outside the detention center's lockup facilities and provides education for students on electronic home monitoring or who are involved in gangs or for other reasons are unable to attend regular public schools. The courthouse location offers more support to students. There is no legal imperative to keep it, yet court officials say it is a priority.

Helen Halpert, chief judge of Juvenile Court, views Alder as crucial to the mission of the juvenile-justice system. Kids who remain in school are less likely to commit crimes and are far more employable as adults.

However, district officials are noncommittal about whether to keep Alder Academy at the courthouse.

Creative minds should reach an accord. County leaders are open to ideas on how to accommodate Alder's 30 to 40 students in the new facilities. Perhaps the design could include classrooms, and the school district could lease them.

Educational and security needs will make replacing Alder expensive. Class sizes are purposely small and numerous supports, such as case workers and other social services, are important.

But if Superintendent José Banda is thinking the best place is the new Children and Family Justice Center, he must act quickly. Court and county leaders are ready to finalize the building plans. Construction would affect the 2014-15 school year.

There is federal and state funding for students in the juvenile court system that could apply to the Alder students. The district should be sure to access all of it.