

# RESIDENTIAL EDUCATION: A RE-INTRODUCTION

- *What is residential education?*
- *What distinguishes residential education?*

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coalition for residential education

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# What is residential education?

We begin with the premise that every child deserves the opportunity to lead a safe, productive, meaningful life. Unfortunately, not every child is born into a family that can sufficiently meet his or her needs without substantial additional assistance. Residential education is a community response to these children's challenges.

**Residential education (RE) is an umbrella term for settings where economically and socially disadvantaged children live and learn together, outside their homes, within stable, supportive environments.** Whether called a preparatory school, children's home, boarding or residential charter school, RE is a viable and important option for thousands of children, particularly teenagers. RE serves children severely challenged by homelessness, abuse, neglect, and low-income, high-crime neighborhoods. The majority of children live on a campus, in single-family homes with a married couple and seven to nine other boys or girls. Other children, mostly in urban areas, live in boarding school-style dormitories with adult mentors. The average length of stay is significantly longer than most other residential programs, underscoring a sense of connection and belonging.

**Family interaction and connections are maintained whenever possible and appropriate.** Whenever possible, children are enrolled in programs in close proximity to their families. Enrollment is usually voluntary, often a choice made by families and sometimes by the children themselves.

Though programmatic models differ, each program shares a core mission: to provide a way for young people to excel through high-quality education. Enrichment programs—including after-school tutoring, recreation, information technology, the arts, and clinical therapy, when necessary—are offered on campus or made easily accessible off campus.

**Residential education is one of a number of solutions for at-risk children.** Long recognized as a desirable model for children from more affluent families, RE affords at-risk children a similar opportunity — helping them navigate a solid course in career, relationships...and in life.

# What distinguishes residential education?

1. **EDUCATION:** support for high-quality education is the cornerstone of RE, provided through ongoing and safe relationships with caring adults who nurture the children academically, emotionally, and sometimes spiritually. By providing stable learning experiences from caring teachers and staff, youth are nurtured academically in the classroom and beyond. Approximately 80% of CORE-member residential education program graduates go on to college.
2. **ENRICHMENT:** opportunities to participate in sports, recreation, and the arts, in addition to tutoring, homework assistance, and usually some clinical treatment, are provided. Values and social skills are also taught.
3. **FAMILY-LIKE SETTING:** the majority of children live within campus communities in single-family homes with two married “house parents.” Others, especially in urban areas, live in dormitories with adult residential advisors. The presence of stable, concerned adults in children’s everyday lives models and lets children experience a healthy family life.
4. **FAMILY PRESERVATION:** efforts are made to keep children geographically close to their homes so that family connections can be maintained, when feasible; the majority of children remain in either the same state or in counties close to their families. Keeping siblings together is also a priority, and can often be accommodated in RE’s larger group settings. Enrollment in a RE program is usually a voluntary choice; 65% of the time made by the family. Family members are encouraged to attend program events including sports games, fine arts performances, and academic progress meetings.
5. **DIFFERENT FROM RESIDENTIAL TREATMENT:** RE emphasizes academic and life skills achievement in family-like settings with a longer length of stay; mental health care is provided as a support. By contrast, residential treatment centers provide temporary environments in which mental health care is primary.
6. **DIFFERENT FROM GROUP HOMES:** group homes typically have staff that work in shifts rather than live-in staff, with a focus on providing a shorter-term, safe shelter for at-risk youth. RE allows longer stays, live-in adult staff, and a strong focus on education.

# What distinguishes residential education? (continued)

7. **FLEXIBILITY, FREEDOM, AND CHOICE:** provisions for weekends with family, off-campus activities, on-campus recreational choices, and flexible academic schedules are offered. The goal is to create an environment as much like a healthy home as possible.
8. **LONGER LENGTHS OF STAY PROMOTE EDUCATION, STABILITY, AND COMMUNITY:** children who live in one setting with the same adults for a longer period of time experience stable schooling and greater academic growth, in addition to a greater sense of connection and belonging.
9. **PREVENTION-FOCUSED:** without longer-term programs like RE, which invest in the futures of children, it is probable that many would end up in juvenile justice facilities or residential treatment centers. Such facilities are shorter-term and generally not education-focused.
10. **GRADUATE SUPPORT/POST-PERMANENCY SERVICES:** children who graduate from RE programs often maintain strong and lasting connections to their “house parents,” teachers, and other youth. The majority of CORE-member RE programs offer college scholarships. For some youth, the program becomes the “home” to which he or she initially returns for vacations and holidays. RE programs offer youth independent living experiences and life skills training while in the program. Many programs also offer housing and other support services to graduates while they are in college or working. For many graduates, the RE community remains an anchor of support and connection throughout their life.
11. **COST-EFFECTIVENESS:** funding for operational costs of RE ranges from accepting no public dollars to heavy reliance on public funding. RE generally is about half the cost of residential treatment. Though more expensive in the short-term than traditional foster care, we maintain that the long-term return on the investment is high. As a fundamental principle, RE promotes a high level of education and emotional stability. Although further research is still needed, the educational success rate among CORE-member RE program graduates is high. As mentioned earlier, approximately 80% of CORE-member residential education program graduates go on to attend college.