

## **Yolo County Children's Movement receives supervisors' support**

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WOODLAND — In a year that has seen the threatened closure of the Yolo Crisis Nursery and looming funding cuts facing First 5 Yolo, county supervisors on Tuesday took the first steps toward creating a countywide “Children’s Movement” to guide future policy and budget decisions that affect children.

The board voted 3-1 to appoint Supervisors Don Saylor and Jim Provenza of Davis to an ad hoc subcommittee to help steer the Yolo County Children’s Movement and to consider allocating county funds — including \$62,000 the first year — to support the movement.

A vote on the proposed funding likely will come during the board’s vote on the 2014-15 budget at the next meeting.

Saylor, Provenza and Supervisor Duane Chamberlain voted in favor of the plan while Supervisor Matt Rexroad of Woodland voted against it. Supervisor Oscar Villegas of West Sacramento recused himself from the discussion and vote because his wife, Katie Villegas, is executive director of the Yolo County Children’s Alliance, which will play an integral role in the children’s movement.

Katie Villegas, who was on hand Tuesday to urge the board’s support for the initiative, noted that children as in interest group “don’t have big marketing budgets behind their needs.”

But their needs are real, she noted, and many are spelled out in a status report recently prepared by the Davis Consultant Network.

The report’s findings will be used to identify gaps in services and programs for children prior to the expected launching of the Children’s Movement next summer.

Among the findings from the report:

- \* 43 percent of live births in Yolo County are paid for by Medi-Cal, a percentage that has been increasing since 2001. Rates are highest among Latinas, African-Americans, teen mothers and those with less than a high school diploma or GED.
- \* 52 percent of Yolo County students were eligible for free or reduced-price meals in 2013.
- \* 40 percent of Yolo County public school students in grades five, seven and nine are overweight or obese. In 2011, statewide rates declined to 32.4 percent while Yolo County’s overweight and obese rates in all but the Davis and Winters school districts climbed.
- \* In 2011 an estimated 24.4 percent of Yolo County children lived in food-insecure households.
- \* One-third of Yolo County teens do not eat breakfast.
- \* 18 percent of Yolo County ninth-grade students report having seriously considered suicide in the prior 12 months, a rate consistent with what is seen statewide.
- \* Since 2008, the total number of subsidized child-care slots in Yolo County has decreased 30 percent, from 3,277 to 2,288.
- \* The percentage of high school sophomores passing the math portion of the California High School Exit Exam increased from 79 percent in 2009 to 86 percent in 2013. But rates vary by students’ economic status, with a 78 percent pass rate for students qualifying for free or reduced-price meals, versus a 91

percent pass rate for those without an economic disadvantage. Woodland and Winters pass rates are below statewide averages.

\* The percentage of Yolo County students in grades 7-11 scoring proficient or higher on the California algebra standardized test increased from 32 percent in 2009 to 36 percent in 2013, but the county rate is lifted by the Davis school district's 66 percent proficiency. All other Yolo County school districts are below the state average.

\* 29 percent of seventh-grade students and 27 percent of ninth-graders reported being bullied two or more times at school in the prior 12 months — both higher than the statewide averages.

\* 10 percent of ninth-grade students in Yolo County said they were a member of a gang, compared to 9 percent statewide.

\* While statewide rates have been decreasing, Yolo County rates of domestic violence calls have increased from 5.9 per 1,000 households in 2008 to 6.9 per 1,000 household in 2012, exceeding the state rate since 2009.

Villegas noted that while Yolo children are not doing as well in areas like food security, obesity, child care and domestic violence, they are doing well in terms of health insurance coverage, oral health, breastfeeding rates and infant mortality.

The plan now, she said, is to identify gaps in services countywide and, along with partners, create a road map for serving Yolo County's children.

One of the motivators behind creating a children's movement was the impending fiscal crisis facing First 5 Yolo.

The agency has been spending down its reserves for the past several years, ever since the state attempted to take local First 5 funds to be used for other purposes. A judge ultimately prevented that, but First 5 Yolo's executive director Julie Gallelo has said commissions around the state "saw the writing on the wall."

"We deliberately spent down our money to ensure it was spent on Yolo County children," Gallelo told supervisors on Tuesday. "Thousands of children and families received services. However, the reserves will be depleted by the next fiscal year."

The fiscal cliff, she has said, gives the commission and other Yolo County agencies an opportunity to assess what services are most needed by children and their families, a process that already has begun with the completion of the children's status report.

But in voting against moving forward with the children's movement, Rexroad questioned why the focus wouldn't remain on children from birth through age 5 — the ages currently served by First 5 Yolo.

"Why would we leave that right now?" he asked. "Why go out and tackle something larger?"

Saylor replied that the focus could well remain on ages 0-5 if that's what the movement determines to be most important.

"But the answer is not yet clear," Saylor said. "The funding for First 5 is disappearing. How do we replace those funds and how do we collectively determine what the best investments are? That's what we're talking about. We're not necessarily talking about expanding.

"There are significant issues across the board for children's services," Saylor said, adding that the idea of a children's movement is to determine where the gaps are.

“They may well be in the First 5 arena,” he said, but they could also be in delinquency prevention, food security, after-school programs or health issues.

“But nothing happens unless there’s a comprehensive effort to look at it,” he said.

Exactly how much county funding will go into the effort is not settled yet either. The board, in its 3-1 vote, directed the newly formed subcommittee to return with a funding plan including \$62,000 for the 2014-15 fiscal year. Staff estimated required funding for the following year at \$59,600.

County funds would be combined with funding from other sources — including from both the Yolo County Children’s Alliance and First 5 Yolo — to finance the children’s movement.

The board meets again on Tuesday, Sept. 23.