

Supporting Children with Disabilities

At the May 26, 2021 Measure X Community Advisory Body (MXCAB) meeting, First 5 Contra Costa, Cocokids, and staff from the Community Services Bureau of the Employment and Human Services Department requested allocations towards supporting children with disabilities. As described in the report to the MXCAB, there is a service gap in services for children ages birth to 3 with disabilities.

At the November 16, Board of Supervisors meeting the proposal was included in the County Administrators' staff report, as a program Board members had requested follow-up information on, but was not feasible due to insufficient funding after addressing other MXCAB and Board of Supervisors' priorities. The proposal was included in Attachment D and for informational purposes, should future allocation opportunities arise.

The proposal stated approximately 783 infant and toddlers and 2,371 preschool children have a diagnosed disability in Contra Costa County, and this number may be undercounted. According to the Health Services Department, developmental screenings for children 0-11 fell from approximately 62% in January 2020 to approximately 55% in April 2021. This lack of screening compounded by decreased well-child visits present a highly significant barrier to preventive care and families' access to an entire system of early childhood resources.

The proposal requests a total of \$2.45M Measure X funding.

- \$2 million would be allocated as grants to providers, on behalf of families, for necessary disability support services.
- \$450,000 would provide consultation and guidance services to childcare providers in support of service and program modifications to build on inclusivity of all children.

On-going Measure X allocations would support efforts to improve access to comprehensive services that support children with disabilities as needed to be independent and included in society. The funding proposal would leverage existing programs and funds dedicated to supporting disabilities services for families.

Attached is a letter of support from the Early Learning Leadership Group (ELLG) that provides additional information regarding the need to provide consultation and guidance services to childcare providers in support of service and program modifications to build on inclusivity of all children.

Recommendation

An on-going allocation of \$450,000 is recommended to provide consultation and guidance services to childcare providers in support of service and program modifications to build on inclusivity of all children.

February 16, 2022

Supervisor Mitchoff, Chair
Supervisor Burgis
Supervisor Andersen
Supervisor Gioia
Supervisor Glover

Dear Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors,

We represent the Contra Costa Interagency Care Collaborative, a group of agencies who serve children ages 0-5 with disabilities and their families. We urge the Board of Supervisors to support the recommendations of the Measure X CAB regarding services for children with disabilities.

As described in the Measure X report, there is an ever present gap in services for children ages birth to 3 with disabilities. Currently there are 783 infant and toddlers and 2,371 preschool children with a diagnosed disability, yet this number is surely an undercount. According to Contra Costa Health Services, developmental screenings for children 0-11 fell from approximately 62% in January 2020 to approximately 55% in April 2021. This lack of screening compounded by decreased well-child visits present a highly significant barrier to preventive care and has further delayed families' access to an entire system of early intervention and childhood resources. This delay in accessing early intervention resources leads to additional delays in getting connected with special education services from Contra Costa school districts, and in getting connected with parent support services.

In addition, in 2019, over 22,000 Contra Costa students ages 3-21 were enrolled in special education. These students were negatively impacted by school and related services moving online in March 2020 and continuing for 15 months. For many students with disabilities the impact has been significant, including learning loss; inadequate progress toward IEP (Individual Education Plan) goals; common core standards, graduation requirements; and in some cases, skill loss that puts them further behind where they were when the pandemic began.

Now more than ever is the time to expand these services. The prolonged disruption of face-to-face education both with distance learning, and school interruptions due to COVID-19 cases, has shown the critical role that parents play in children's learning. The transition to online education relied heavily on parents and caregivers to support their children. Yet not all parents have the skills or resources to do so. Many have lost jobs and the means to take care of their families. Others may have limited time to care for their children due to work and other family responsibilities. Many have never received support in facilitating play-based learning or helping their children to develop skills in

literacy and math. This is particularly true for parents of children with disabilities, ethnic and linguistic minorities, and other marginalized groups, as guidance on supporting children’s meaningful learning and development has been inadequate.

Parents and caregivers themselves have faced high levels of stress and isolation during the pandemic, while also being called on to support their children’s mental well-being.

As indicated in the original Measure X proposal, there are existing entities such as First 5 Contra Costa, Care Parent Network, and other community based organizations in this Collaborative that have existing mechanisms in place to partner and already provide these essential services to children with disabilities and their families. These programs are equipped to expand services to meet this immediate, critical need.

It is going to take years of consistent support and intervention to help families adequately recover from the pandemic, and this is especially true for families of children with disabilities. We are fortunate that our county has systems in place to provide the supports necessary now.

We strongly urge the Board of Supervisors to seize this unique opportunity and accept the recommendations of the Measure X CAB to fund these essential services for some of our most vulnerable students and families.

Sincerely,

Aaron Alarcon-Bowen, PhD
Executive Director
Community Services Bureau

Hannah Michaelson
Program Director
Care Parent Network

Ruth Fernández, Ed.D.
Executive Director
First 5 Contra Costa

Christine Sedlack Rottger
Director of Children’s Services
VistAbility

Heather Coleman, PhD
Early Childhood Mental Health Therapist
Early Childhood Mental Health Program

Stacy Frauwirth
Director of Child Development Services
Through the Looking Glass

Lori Belhumeur, LCSW
ABCD Center, Mental Health Clinical Specialist

Cc: Monica Nino, County Administrator; Lisa Driscoll, County Finance Director, County Administrator’s Office.