

BOARD OF EDUCATION

County trustees start college commitment program

By CATHY KELLY

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SANTA CRUZ — County education trustees Thursday kicked off a new drive to send more students to college.

In a presentation about the Santa Cruz County College Commitment, Theresa Rouse of the county Office of Education said the idea arose at a July symposium featuring a “college promise program” in Long Beach. It guarantees one year of college funding for high school graduates who cannot afford college, she said.

County school districts leaders, along with Cabrillo College President Brian King and representatives of UC Santa Cruz, Cal State Monterey Bay and others, have been working on it since, she said. They meet again Sept. 2.

Rouse presented statistics showing that more education leads to better earnings and even better health. She said “21st century learning” strategies should educate students well enough so that they can create their own jobs.

Rouse said the drive must start as early as preschool, while reporting a “scary” statistic from Cabrillo College showing that 90 percent of first-time students are not ready for college-level math or English.

“We have to commit to improving it all,” she said.

One of the first plans is to take fourth-graders on field trips to college, to get them to start aiming in that direction, Rouse said.

Trustee Jack Dilles asked if there is a specific goal, and Rouse said it’s a “little open-ended,” but an early step of a

feasibility study to gauge community support for the effort is under consideration.

She said she hoped local school boards would pass resolutions of support this month. She said community partners will be needed.

Trustee Arnie Levine suggested tapping into alumni groups; others stressed the importance of parent involvement.

Answering a question from trustee Dana Sales, Rouse said high school exit exams are not a good gauge of college readiness, as they test to below-college levels. The state Department of Education’s Early Assessment Program is a better measure, she said.

In other action, board members asked that an ongoing concern surrounding Pacific Collegiate School be placed on a future agenda. The issue

arose this week when Santa Cruz City Schools trustee Ken Wagman sent an email message to the board questioning the “propriety” of having the principal of the high-performing charter school contact parents who haven’t given a voluntary contribution to support the school.

Wagman said he was troubled the principal wrote the April 2011 letter, since the principal has the authority to schedule classes and take disciplinary action for students. That makes the request “too heavy handed” to be truly voluntary, Wagman said.

Santa Cruz City Schools denied the Santa Cruz school’s charter initially, and it was granted by the county board.

Watkins said he did not yet know when the issue might return. He said it depends on the content of the letter.