



Preschool forced to lay off 4

First 5 continues to struggle with budget cuts

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BUDGET ISSUES—The Pleasant Valley School District board of trustees voted recently to cut four employees at the Pleasant Valley Neighborhood for Learning, a program run by First 5. The layoffs are due to the loss of revenue generated from a tobacco tax, the primary source of funding for First 5.

The Pleasant Valley School District board of trustees voted March 14 to lay off four employees at the Pleasant Valley Neighborhood for Learning, a program of First 5, a public agency that provides services to children from birth to age 5.

While First 5 is separate from the district, its

Camarillo campus is contracted through PVSD, making the district the employer.

The cuts are due to the loss of revenue generated from the Prop. 10 tobacco tax, the primary source of funding for First 5. With fewer people smoking in California, First 5 has had to make cuts at its 11

Neighborhoods for Learning throughout the county.

At the Camarillo location, lack of funding led the school district to cut an executive director, administrative assistant, lead literacy teacher and family resource specialist by the end of the school year.

As of now, First 5 officials are working to figure out a way to keep providing services to families as they reorganize staffing and review the agency's locations. The Camarillo early childhood education center on Temple Avenue may be one of the facilities to be closed, but that decision won't be made until next month, said Petra Puls, executive director of First 5 Ventura County.

"We have half the resources, about 50 percent less, than what we had 20 years ago," she said.

First 5 has been tapping into its saving account to stay afloat, but Puls said that money will be gone by June.

To try to retain as many sites as possible, First 5 is partnering with Interface Children and Family Services, a Camarillo-based nonprofit social services agency.

"We found an opportunity to streamline our approach and stretch our dollars even further," Puls said via email.

Interface will take over the 11 site contracts at the end of June and look for new ways to maximize First 5 programs with minimal expense. Ten of the contracts are with schools, while the 11th is with the Simi Valley Boys & Girls Club.

PVSD Superintendent Angelica Ramsey lamented the possible loss of the program, citing its benefit for early childhood development.

"It is sad that service delivery will change, effectively hurting families," Ramsey said in an email to the *Acorn*.

Puls said she, too, sees the program's worth in the community and wants as many of the locations to stay open.

"The goal is to keep as many (locations) open as we can, which is why we are working very hard to find low-cost facilities," Puls said.

Ramsey said at the March 14 meeting that First 5 and PVSD are working together to keep the Camarillo location open.

"The good news is, as of last week, we heard that we are still in contention to have one of the hubs in Camarillo," Ramsey said.