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County to create child care task force

By Emily Coakley : The Herald-Sun
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CHAPEL HILL -- A new task force will examine county residents' child care needs, including how the business community can become more involved in the issue.

Orange County Commissioners Tuesday night unanimously approved a motion to create the Orange County Child Care Task Force.

Valerie Foushee, a commissioner who has been interested in child care issues, said when the task force is complete, she hopes there will be more information and "we will have strategies to meet our child care needs in this county. I think all of us know the benefits of early childhood education."

Employees who are not worried about their children and child care are more productive, she said.

In 2005 the county's Department of Social Services wrote a report and made recommendations on subsidizing child care in the county. The report quoted a Child Care Services Association figure that families can spend more than \$1,000 per month, per child on full-time day care.

"Our charge would be particularly to get the business community involved," Nancy Coston, director of the county's Social Services, told the commissioners.

The commissioners also want the community to be aware of how early childhood education can help children, as well as have workplaces supporting families and children more, according to the task force's charge.

The task force charge includes updating information on: employers who provide subsidies or help their workers in other ways with child care; how many people the county's subsidies help; and how many people are on waiting lists for those subsidies.

Commissioners Chairman Barry Jacobs suggested the 20-member task force add four parents who use child care in the county.

Social Services uses state federal and county funds to help subsidize child care for eligible families. Orange County spent an additional \$50,000 last year on helping fund child care.

"I think you will clearly see a big return on your investment," said Michele Rivest,

director of the Orange County Partnership for Children.

For every dollar spent on early childhood education, Rivest said, \$17 is saved in future social costs.

Rivest thanked the commissioners for approving the task force.

"I think this task force and the issue of quality child care is so important," she said.

The Child Care Services Association also helps subsidize families, too.

Part of the task force's report will look at whether child care facilities will be needed at some new places, such as Carolina North, the planned research campus in Chapel Hill, or public schools.

The task force is scheduled to have an organizational meeting on April 18. The commissioners have asked for a report and recommendations no later than June.

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