



Gov. Wilson talks with students at Healthy Start facility opening Monday at Robertson Road School. Bart Ah You/The Bee

'Our school has expanded into a true village of opportunity for our families'
— John Campopiano

Healthy Start for Modesto kids

By DORSEY GRIFFITH
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The children of Robertson Road School silently paraded two-by-two and hand-in-hand into the big white tent and took seats on the ground as row upon row of well-dressed guests, including Gov. Wilson and his wife, looked on.

For the many dignitaries, news media and others in the audience, the display was a reminder that the hand-shaking hoopla surrounding the official

opening of the Healthy Start Family Resource Center was, after all, for the children.

For less than an hour Monday, even partisan politics were cast aside as officials and representatives from a collage of public and private agencies celebrated the kickoff of the unusual Healthy Start project — a full-fledged medical clinic with dental and mental health treatment services — plus recreational, parenting and tutoring programs — open to

students and their families and located smack dab on the Modesto elementary school's campus.

"You are the model to be followed by many, many more," Wilson told the group. "Your community is making the wisest investment you can — an investment in your children." Wilson said no school reform plan, even the one he outlined with fanfare last week, can work

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Gov. Wilson is flanked by wife Gall and Modesto City Schools Superintendent James Enochs at Monday ceremony. Bart Ah You/The Bee

CLINIC: Nothing but praise for Healthy Start facility at school

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if the children are not healthy enough to concentrate or motivated enough to learn.

"The whole point of Healthy Start is timely intervention, because the early years are critical," Wilson said. "If we get it right at the front end, they will be much better, happier students."

Healthy Start is being paid for in part by a three-year, \$400,000 state grant authorized through legislation the Republican governor sponsored in 1991. Stuart Foundation and Sierra Foundation grants helped get a diverse committee of community leaders to plan the project, in-kind contributions to the project netted Healthy Start an additional \$1.5 million.

More than 200 schools in California received the state grants. But the Robertson Road project, and a similar program to open later this year at Hanshaw

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Middle School, are two of only 18 in the state and 500 nationwide that will offer full-service, school-based programs.

The project won hearty praise from Democrat Margaret Snyder, now a Modesto assemblywoman, who helped plan the grant proposal during her tenure as a member of the Modesto City Schools Board.

"This is one area in which the governor and I are in complete agreement," she said as she took her seat next to fellow Assembly member Sal Cannella, D-Ceres. "Prevention is the key."

Stanislaus County health

officials also lauded the clinic's opening. Beverly Finley, chief executive officer at Stanislaus Medical Center, said access to primary care services within the community will translate to fewer people seeking costly hospital emergency room care.

Larry Poaster, director of the county Mental Health Department, said Healthy Start offers a vision of the future for mental health services, away from the old mental health clinic model and toward programs that put other health and social services under the same roof.

While officials and politicians tend to agree that Healthy Start and other programs like it make sense, Modesto City Schools Superintendent James Enochs pointed out that some people oppose Healthy Start because they are worried it could expose children to family planning information.

"The Board of Education has spent many a long night listening to people who seem uncommonly preoccupied with human reproduction," he said in his address. "That's not what this is about. It's about not having thousands of children hobbled at the gate."

"It's recognition that we will never have the kind of society we want until we begin treating all children as if they were our own."

Robertson Road Principal John Campopiano used an African proverb to describe the approach.