

# Aurora advocates rally for early education

BY ERIKA WURST

ewurst@stmedianetwork.com

**AURORA** — For the second time in two months, leaders of about a dozen Aurora agencies got together Monday to brainstorm ways to bolster early childhood education throughout the city.

“We have a lot of resources in the community that aren’t being utilized because people don’t know about them,” said Michael Meyer of Fox Valley United Way.

Meyer, along with members of the Kane County Health Department, the city of Aurora, YWCA, One Hope United, Hesed House, the Aurora Public Library and other agencies invested in the future of Aurora’s youngest learners are hoping to create a council that would address the problems facing early education.

The group, tentatively called the Aurora Early Learning Council, met at the Kane County Health Department’s Aurora offices.

State Sen. Linda Holmes and repre-

sentatives of state Rep. Linda Chapa LaVia’s office were also present to help identify key factors that should be looked at by the group.

“Part of this initiative involves pulling every part of childhood learning together,” Meyer said.

The council aims to be a “one-stop shop” for parents who are seeking resources for their children.

Success by Six Committee Chairman Maryanne Locklin said the council should be focused in its efforts, and asked for mission statement and goal suggestions from the early childhood advocates.

“The bottom line is that we can’t solve poverty, but (early childhood education) is something we can do something about,” she said.

Some of the group’s goals included giving parents access to information about child development — starting from the moment their children are born. Working with hospitals, clinics and day care programs will help achieve this goal, Locklin said.

The council also plans an effort to

make sure all eligible children have access to publicly funded preschool programs.

As inspiration, the group looked to a vision statement out of Oklahoma’s early learning initiative that states “all children should be healthy, happy, eager to learn and ready to succeed by the time they enter kindergarten.”

Holmes shortened the tag line.

“Kids ready to learn and succeed,” she said.

Others chimed in with, “Every child ready to thrive,” and “Prepared and eager to learn by kindergarten.”

Whatever slogan they decide on will be just the beginning of the group’s efforts.

While volunteers are great, it is going to be important to hire people who can take on the council’s initiatives on a full-time basis, Meyer said.

United Way has already begun seeking funds to hire a council director who would work with a task force of volunteers who will create ideas and programs to promote early education.