

Efforts under way to increase higher ed opportunities in county

By Nick Baptista/ The Valley Springs News/ June 11, 2014

District 1 Supervisor Cliff Edson and a committee of about a dozen county residents are working to improve higher education opportunities in Calaveras County.

As the Calaveras High School Class of 2014 graduates Wednesday evening, many will be off to further their education far from home. Edson and his committee are working to reverse the trend.

“We’re basically raising our kids to leave,” Edson said. “We’d like to keep the kids here for at least a couple of years longer. If they can get their junior college education here that will be invaluable to their families and the county itself.”

Edson and his committee have had preliminary discussions with San Joaquin Delta College officials and those talks have been promising.

The north half of the county has been in the Delta college since the passage of Measure L back in 2004, a \$250 million bond measure that promised to establish new education centers in local communities throughout the district including one in Calaveras County.

A proposal for a 60-acre Valley Springs satellite campus was dropped in 2006 when cost overruns on other Delta projects quickly eroded the pot of Measure L money and a 2010 plan to build a six-acre learning center was nixed due to projected costs, the recession and questions whether the campus would attract enough students to make it feasible to operate.

Instead of building a campus at this time, the group’s proposal calls for Delta to use existing facilities such as the libraries in Valley Springs, San Andreas, Copperopolis, West Point and the Railroad Flat School as learning centers.

“We don’t need a brick and mortar location at this point,” he said.

More important is a commitment from Delta to consistently offer general education classes at existing locations, he added.

Consistency is the key, he said, because if there is no guarantee local students can get classes here, they will have to look elsewhere.

Thanks to the group’s efforts, Delta College will resume evening classes next fall on the Calaveras High School campus. Those classes will include English, history and computer science.

Edson hopes to see class offerings expand in the next few years so local high school graduates can get most or all of their general education requirements without leaving the county. He’d also like to see the college offer trade and vocational education classes in the county.

It is the Calaveras County Junior College Education group’s goal to reach a written agreement with Delta outlining how the college will work to expand higher education offerings in the county. If that fails, he said, the group will not be bashful at looking at other options, such as going to the state, to make sure local tax dollars collected for higher education are spent on local students.