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# Doing more for children in need

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School board appointee has lengthy experience as special advocate for at-risk youth

By Eric Kurhi

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HAYWARD — It was a dozen years ago, while teaching third grade in a South Central Los Angeles elementary school, that Philip Ladew decided he wanted to become a legal advocate for children.

"There was a student, she was the greatest little girl, but it was clear there were some (learning) delays and she needed some assistance," Ladew said.

He said teachers didn't have the tools to get the girl into an educational plan that would help her move forward.

"Teachers were trying as hard as they could to help youth, but that was mixed with a system that wasn't working, and she missed out on a whole year of education before something was done," he said. "To rob someone of that education, that's criminal."

Ladew, who recently was appointed as a trustee on the Alameda County Board of Education, then went to law school and landed at the Child Dependency Division of the county Public Defender's Office before taking his current post as associate and legal director of the California

CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates) Association.

He heard that the Board of Education was seeking applications for a trustee to replace Felix Elizalde, who died in September.

"I figured I have some background and experience that I could bring to the board," Ladew said.

In particular, Ladew said he's worked extensively with at-risk youth who have entered the legal system. They're the same kids who find their cases coming before the board, and the ones who the county is often responsible for educating, whether they are in juvenile hall or boarding homes or elsewhere.

"On a policy level, I would like to look at our foster services, our programs for teen mothers and juvenile hall programs, and just make sure we have the best policy for the kids we serve," he said.

Ladew said the biggest issues in front of them involve funding cuts. He said mental health services have been slashed at the state level, and despite federal requirements that all kids be given a "free, appropriate public education," they don't know where the money will come from.

"Those are the sort of issues that we are going to be facing," he said. "It's not a time in education to sit back on your laurels. It's time to understand process, do the reading and research, and hopefully come up with some solutions."

Ladew represents San Leandro, Ashland, Castro Valley, Cherryland, San Lorenzo and Fairview on the board of education.

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