

Forest Grove High School School-Based Health Center Questions & Answers

1. Why is a school-based health center needed?

Research is clear that healthy students learn better and have better attendance. Students can't learn if they are not in class. The goal is to provide access to health care so that all students receive the medical and mental health care they need to stay healthy and in school. Many students do not have health insurance and subsequently do not receive adequate health care. Access to health care is a big issue even for those who do have health insurance. It's difficult for many parents to get time off work to take their children to medical appointments.

2. Where would the Forest Grove school-based health center be located?

The center would be located next to the tennis courts at Forest Grove High School. The district has received a \$402,137 community development block grant to pay the entire cost of constructing the building. No school district money will be used to construct or equip the center.

3. Why not use that money instead to build additional classrooms at the high school?

The grant was awarded for this specific project. If the district does not build the new health center, the grant money would go back to the community development block grant program for reallocation to other projects in the county.

4. Who would the center serve?

The primary focus would be students at Forest Grove High School, but the center would be open to all students in the Forest Grove School District. It would be up to parents to transport their children to the center for treatment.

5. Who would run the center?

The center would be operated by a medical provider – either Virginia Garcia Memorial Health Center, which is operating the Tigard High School Health Center, or Tuality Healthcare. While the center would be located on school district property, the medical provider would assume all liability for the operation of the center. A community mental health provider would provide mental health services at the center as a subcontractor of the medical provider.

6. What services would the school-based health center offer?

The center would provide a variety of services, including: routine physical exams, immunizations, diagnosing and treating illnesses and minor injuries, managing chronic conditions (i.e., allergies, asthma, diabetes, seizures), mental health assessment and services, vision, dental and blood pressure screenings, health and nutrition education, and age and developmentally-appropriate services (i.e. abstinence counseling, reproductive health exams and sexually transmitted infection tests).

7. How would it be staffed?

The center would be staffed by a fulltime nurse practitioner, a licensed mental health counselor and an office assistant. The staff would be employees of the medical and mental health providers.

8. Would the center dispense contraceptives?

A 17-member Steering Committee composed of parents, students, staff and representatives of the faith and medical communities has recommended that the center NOT dispense contraceptives or write prescriptions for contraceptives. The School Board will make the final decision on that issue.

9. How would the center be funded?

Grants have already been secured to cover the first three years of operation. The business plan calls for the center to be financially self-sustaining by the end of year three by billing private insurance and the Oregon Health Plan. Over 52 percent of students in the Forest Grove School District qualify for free or reduced lunches and therefore may be eligible for insurance coverage under the Oregon Health Plan. Representatives of the various health system and medical provider partners have reviewed and had input into the business plan for the center.

10. Is the district incurring any cost for this center?

The district's contribution is that we're providing the site for the center and in-kind support of custodial service, utilities and computers. We estimate the cost of that in-kind support at no more than \$10,000 per year. This is the same type of in-kind contribution that the district makes to other programs that are housed in district buildings.

11. Would the district be financially liable for students who can't pay for medical service?

No, the medical provider assumes all financial liability for the operation of the center. If a student has no medical insurance, the district is not responsible for paying for his or her treatment. The medical provider has that liability.

12. Would the center be competing with local medical providers?

No. The expectation is that students who already have a family doctor will continue to see their own doctor on an on-going basis. But experience around the state shows that insured students will access the health center for immediate medical needs rather than miss classes or be absent from school.

13. Would students need parental permission or notification to access the health center?

Oregon law allows anyone age 15 and older to seek medical help without parental permission. That is true of any health facility, not just a school based health center. But staff of the health center would encourage students to communicate with their parents about health care they received at the center. One of the Steering Committee's recommendations is that the district and medical provider develop policies that encourage parental involvement and communication about their children's health care, within the limits of Oregon law.

14. What happens to the building if the school-based health center ever has to discontinue operating?

The terms of the federal community development block grant that will fund construction of the building require that the building be used as a public facility. There's a whole gamut of uses that would be allowed, but the district would need to go to the community development block grant program to ask permission for a change of use.

15. Where did the idea of a school-based health center originate?

The Washington County Commission on Children and Families brought together over two dozen partners after county school superintendents declared health care is a critical need in their districts. The area's major hospital systems -- including Tuality Healthcare, Kaiser Permanente, Legacy Health Systems and Providence Health and Services, as well as Virginia Garcia Memorial Health Center -- has had a role in planning and funding school-based health centers in the county. These include the one that opened in April at Tigard High School and ones that are planned in Forest Grove, Beaverton and Hillsboro.

16. Who else has school-based health centers?

Tigard High School opened its school-based health center in April. Beaverton School District has had a school-based health center at its Merlo Station high school for about 10 years. Portland Public Schools have had school-based health centers for over 20 years. In all, there are 46 school-based health centers in Oregon, and planning is underway for another 17. The Oregon Legislature allocated \$2 million in 2008 to help with planning and start-up costs for the new centers, plus appropriated \$3 million to support the state's existing centers.