



OPS plan for school-based health centers moves ahead

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Omaha children will have access to basic health care at six schools when classes start next August. Plans are progressing for the school-based health centers within the Omaha Public Schools.

The goal is to open all of the centers at the beginning of the school year.

Each will have a private exam space within the building, be staffed by a nurse practitioner and be overseen by a local hospital or clinic.

Health staff in the Omaha district recently presented an update to the school board. A change in the plan, being finalized by the school district, Building Bright Futures and the hospitals and clinics, extends access to the centers to students and their minor siblings from the neighborhood near the health clinic school. The new plan also has changed the list of schools with a health center.

Under the previous plan, Blackburn Alternative High School, and Franklin and Kennedy Elementary Schools were to have centers. Now, King Science and Technology Magnet Center, and Bevedere and Liberty Elementary Schools will host health centers, as will Indian Hill, Kellom and Spring Lake elementary schools, which had been included in the previous plan.

Under the new plan, said OPS Health Supervisor Sharon Wade, students at Marrs Magnet and Bancroft Elementary could use the center at nearby Spring Lake. Originally, only Spring Lake students would have been able to use the center.

If a parent can't transport his or her child to the center, school staff would be able to drive the child so long as there was parental permission.

The centers will provide basic care and treatment for conditions such as diabetes or asthma. They will not take the place of a family doctor and will not be able to handle emergency needs. All children will be treated, regardless of whether they have health insurance. The center staff also will help eligible families acquire Medicaid benefits.

"This should address some of the truancy issues we have," said board member Freddie Gray.

Students who aren't receiving treatment now will have access to care for basic ailments such as ear infections or the flu. Officials hope that will get students back in the classroom faster.

The recently passed federal health care reform bill includes \$50 million in grant support for school-based health centers. The Omaha program plans to apply for some of that funding.

It's unknown how much the six centers will cost in the first year, but expenses will be covered through grants from Building Bright Futures, the supporting hospitals and clinics and other sources. Minor updates to some of the OPS buildings involved also were paid for by Building Bright Futures.

A bill setting state regulations for the centers was adopted by the Legislature Friday and is awaiting approval by the governor. Among its regulations, Legislative Bill 1106 prohibits the centers from dispensing contraceptives or offering any related counseling.

SCHOOL-BASED HEALTH CENTERS

The following schools will have health centers next school year:

Belvedere Elementary, 3775 Curtis Ave.

Kellom Elementary, 1311 N. 24 St.

King Science and Technology Magnet Center, 3720 Florence Blvd.

Liberty Elementary, 2021 St. Mary's Ave.

Indian Hill Elementary, 3121 U St.

Spring Lake Elementary Magnet, 4215 S. 20th St.

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