

### SYSTEM CHANGE INITIATIVE: School Based Health Centers

*“Despite the perception across the nation, we have 40 million families without access to health care. Anything schools can be doing to facilitate basic services, we need to step up.” Dan Jamison, Superintendent, Sherwood School District*

*“It’s the right thing to do. But it’s the kind of thing where there is not a lot of funding, and it is going to take a lot of collaboration.” Dick Stenson, President Tuality Healthcare*

The Washington County Commission on Children and Families surveyed all schools in the county in 2006, as part of its Community Schools Initiative, which had emerged as a community priority in the 2002 Comprehensive Community Plan for Children and Families.

The survey gathered information about building level community school services and supports available and needs to help students be successful in school and to address the out-of-school time needs of their families’.

The data was used to develop action plans to increase community and school supports for community schools. 110 principals or their designees out of 116 principals completed the survey (a 95% return rate!) from all seven school districts. The 110 schools represented an overall enrollment of nearly 77,000 students, and included elementary, middle and high schools as well as alternative schools.

In June of 2006, members of the Commission on Children and Families presented preliminary findings from the survey to Superintendents at their regular bi-monthly meeting. Among the gaps that emerged from the survey was a lack of access to health and mental health care for students in need. Many of the schools expressed in-



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terest in seeing strategies implemented to provide school-based health and mental health services.

Following the presentation, one of the Superintendents said that since the need for school based health and mental health services was so prevalent, he would like to work to establish a school based health center in every high school in his district.

Discussion followed amongst the Superintendents, and the Commission on Children and Families was asked to convene a cross district team to meet with representatives from County Health and Mental Health to explore the possibility of building a collaboration to establish school based health centers in Washington County.



Subsequently a countywide School Based Health Center Initiative collaborative was launched to develop and implement a five year plan establishing school based health centers to provide access for students from all seven districts.

The collaborative involves representatives from more than 20 school districts and community organizations, including: all seven school districts and the Northwest Regional ESD, County Mental Health, County Health, Virginia Garcia Memorial Health Center, LifeWorks NW, Providence Health Systems, Tuality HealthCare, Legacy Health Systems, OHSU and Pacific University, Vision Action Network, the Commission on Children and Families and other community organizations and advocates.

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The collaborative's first task was to gather additional information to assess the need for school based health services, finding:

- In 2006, 11% of children or over 15,000 children and youth in Washington County have not health insurance with a higher percentage of uninsured among the county's 74,000 Hispanic residents.
- Uninsured children are 30% less likely to receive medical attention when injured, less likely to use preventive services and more likely to use expensive emergency services for primary care needs.
- The 2006 Oregon Healthy Teens Survey found that 54% of county eighth graders reported they had not had a medical exam in the prior year, 30% had not had a dental exam, 16% were at high risk for depression and 13% had considered suicide.
- The nurse to student ratio in county schools is 1:4,444.
- Only one, limited service, school based health center exists in the county at present, established to serve pregnant and parenting teens, which is accessible to some 450 of the county's more than 80,000 students.

The School Based Health Center Initiative has been developing an innovative, robust and financially sustainable model of care in mainstream schools; a model that achieves community and student acceptance, has positive outcomes and offers a prototype that can be replicated throughout the county. The goals and measures of success of the model are to increase health and mental health care access, provide needed services, minimize duplication, ensure continuity of care with students' primary care providers and improve the health of at-risk youth.

School based health centers are an effective and proven model to increase access to health and mental health services, to reduce

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the loss of class time and to improve the physical and emotional health of children and youth. Statewide experience demonstrates that 60% of students who access a school based health center are otherwise unlikely to receive care, and 67% of users report better health as a result of accessing care.

As a result of the collaborative planning process, Sherwood School District was able to establish a partnership with Providence Health Systems for school-linked services to provide improved access to health care services in the Sherwood community through the Providence clinic located there. This partnership was formalized in the fall of 2007.

The Tigard-Tualatin School District voted unanimously in September 2007 to enter into an agreement with Virginia Garcia Memorial Health Center to open a school based health center on the Tigard High School Campus in early 2008. Virginia Garcia will be the medical provider for the center and will contract with Life-Works NW to provide mental health services through the school based health center. The center is now on track to open in March 2008, and will be the first full service school based health center in Washington County. It is expected that more than half of the 1,900 students at Tigard High School will visit the clinic each year.

In addition, the Forest Grove School Board voted unanimously to authorize the district administration to begin a community planning process for development of a school based health center to serve students from Forest Grove, Banks and Gaston School Districts, ideally at Forest Grove High School in 2008-09.

To support the planning, development and first year of operations for the Tigard center, and to explore the feasibility of establishing centers in other school districts, the collaboration has worked hard to secure funds from a variety of sources, with staff from the Commission on Children and Families taking the lead in grant writing. As of the end of December 2007, almost \$700,000 in public and private funds has been secured to support the development and first year of operations of the Tigard school based health center,

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planning to determine the feasibility of opening a center in Forest Grove School District during the 2008-09 school year, and to support initial exploration of establishing centers in the Hillsboro and Beaverton School Districts in subsequent years. Major contributors to the school based health center start up funding include: ,Kaiser Permanente Community Fund, Providence Health Systems, Pacific Source, United Way of the Columbia-Willamette, Northwest Health Foundation, the Oregon Department of Human Services, County Mental Health and County Health and the Commission on Children and Families.

*“The purpose of the health center is to provide easier access to health care for students. Healthy kids learn better.” Susan Stark Haydon, Public Information Officer, Tigard Tualatin School District*

