

Sex-ed clinic headed to Hopkins High School

By PATRICE RELERFORD, Star Tribune

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As the parameters of sex education in schools are debated statewide, one suburban high school is making plans to begin an on-campus teen clinic that will offer pregnancy and STD screening and other services this fall.

Hopkins School District staff presented plans for a satellite office of the West Suburban Teen Clinic at Hopkins High to school board members during a recent meeting.

The Minneapolis and St. Paul school districts operate health clinics at several of their high schools, but experts say few suburban districts offer on-site reproductive health care.

"West Suburban [Teen Clinic] has been around a long time, and they're a good organization," said Brigid Riley, executive director of the Minnesota Organization on Adolescent Pregnancy, Prevention and Planning. Riley said Minnesota was one of the first places in the country to have school-based clinics.

In Minnesota, minors have access to reproductive health care such as birth control or testing for sexually transmitted disease without parental consent. Even so, staff members assured Hopkins school board members that parents would be allowed to withhold consent for students to be seen at the clinic.

"We don't want to do anything that will harm the relationship between

parents and schools or schools and students," said Terry Bosacker, executive director of the West Suburban Teen Clinic, which has an office in Excelsior.

The district signs on

Hopkins school board members supported the plan and asked the district staff to move forward with outlining the relationship between the district and the clinic.

Jan Ormasa, the district's special services director, said a memorandum of understanding will be submitted to board members this summer or early this fall. The clinic, which is expected to be open one day a week, would be phased in during the 2008-09 school year.

Bosacker said her office received a draft of the memo last week. She said the clinic's services will be free to students as a result of funding from federal, state and local sources. The district also would not have to pay anything for the clinic's services.

"Basically, what we're doing is providing a site for them and they're providing all of the services," said Hopkins High nurse Bobbi Pointer. "I refer [students] to West Suburban a half-dozen times a week, and now it'll be accessible to all kids -- not just those with cars."

Pointer said clinic staff also will help with support groups for Hopkins students and education resources for parents.

The state debate

Minnesota's sex-education debate heated up in St. Paul this spring after legislators introduced a measure that would require schools to include birth control and STD information in their health programs.

Proponents of the plan withdrew it from the omnibus education bill

after Gov. Tim Pawlenty pledged to veto the entire bill if it included the sex education program.

Meanwhile, in the Hopkins School District, many parents expressed support for the idea at school-sponsored workshops this year. Pointer said there's also strong support for the clinic among Hopkins High students and staff members.

"The building administration supported the idea from the beginning, but we needed to get board approval," said Mary Slinde, Hopkins High's associate principal.

Some of that support could stem from student data collected by the 2007 Minnesota Student Survey. It revealed this year that more than half of Hopkins High seniors were sexually active. It's the highest level of sexual activity ever reported at the school, district officials said.

Pointer said students ask her about sexual health issues almost daily. She estimated that she worked with a dozen pregnant teens this year, and said she would like to see the number decrease next year.

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