

The doctor is in: New school-based clinics will serve students, teachers and families

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Students and staff at Central Kitsap and Bremerton schools will spend more time learning and teaching and less time traveling to and from the doctor's office this year, thanks to three new school-based clinics opening this fall.

Kids who use the school-based Peninsula Community Health Services clinics will have medical providers, mental health counselors, and chemical dependency professionals on-site, without parents having to take time off of work to take them to the doctor.

"We're looking to provide the same care we do in the clinics but in the schools where the kids can get to it," Peninsula Community Health Services CEO Jennifer Kreidler-Moss said. "Just from a logistic standpoint, packing up any family to go to the doctor's office in the middle of the workday is just hard to do."

That was a barrier to healthcare for students at Central Kitsap schools, said Andrea Bowman, CKSD assistant director of student services. Parents who didn't have jobs with paid days off were sometimes unable to take time off work to bring their child to and from the doctor, she said.

"This is a way for us to assist families in accessing the care that they want. They want the services, but sometimes their life reality is preventing them from having access," Bowman said. "We are always seeking higher attendance rates, yet we're also saying get your healthcare needs met. Those two don't always match, but this actually reduces time out of class."

Improving accessibility has been at the forefront of PCHS's recent additions to its healthcare system. It rolled out a [mobile primary care van \(/story/news/local/2019/03/02/peninsula-community-health-services-rolls-out-mobile-clinic/3005165002/\)](#) and a [behavioral health van \(/story/news/2019/06/04/pchs-bus-hits-road-provide-mental-health-care/1334087001/\)](#) earlier this year and put a clinic in the Bremerton Salvation Army.

The first PCHS school-based clinic [opened in the North Mason School District last year \(/story/news/local/2019/02/28/school-based-clinics-kitsap-public-health-agency/3010452002/\)](#) and was used heavily by students. In the 45 days medical providers were on site, the PCHS North Mason clinic saw 295 visits, and in the 45 days behavioral health providers were on site, the clinic saw 723 visits. The total patients seen for both types of care was 140.

"The fact that we ended up having a thousand visits in the North Mason system was really exciting because those were kids that either got to stay in school for the day or parents who didn't have to leave work to get their kid seen," Kreidler-Moss said.

This data helped form agreements with Central Kitsap and Bremerton schools to implement clinics there, Kreidler-Moss said.

"The beauty of what we kind of see now is we went from our one school-based clinic to three systems, which gives us better coverage," Kreidler-Moss said. "From a pilot to a program is where we're at right now, so we're excited about that."

Central Kitsap

The Central Kitsap school clinics will be located at Esquire Hills Elementary and Fairview Middle School for students and staff across the district to get care. The clinics for both schools will be located in the main office and will have hours before and after school for kids in the district outside of those two schools. The Fairview clinic will be open three days a week, while Esquire Hills' clinic will be open two days a week and will also allow families of students to be seen.



Peninsula Community Health Service medical assistant Deedre-Anne Otero takes the blood pressure of Xaviar Clark, 12, as his brother JJ, 13, left, looks on in the PCHS office at Mountain View Middle School on Tuesday. The brothers were getting their school sports physicals at the new school-based clinic at the annual back-to-school event. (Photo: MEEGAN M. REID / KITSAP SUN)

"That school is going to be exciting for us to see them take a family approach," Kreidler-Moss said of Esquire Hills. "The school will help us know families who are attached to the school. It still won't be a free-standing clinic where anybody can walk in, it'll be a family clinic."

The partnership between PCHS and Central Kitsap was formed after Bowman was hired to support behavioral, social, and emotional learning. She found a grant for a school-based clinic and contacted Kreidler-Moss about a potential partnership. The schools had to have a certain number of students with free or reduced lunch, and Esquire Hills was the only school in the Central Kitsap School District to qualify. But Kreidler-Moss said it could be done without a grant. After hearing about it, the Fairview Middle School principal wanted to implement a clinic there, too, Bowman said.

"This side of our district had some of the higher needs, so it made sense to start with those two schools," Bowman said.

Bremerton

The Bremerton school clinic will be hosted at Mountain View Middle School, in administrative offices of what was originally purposed as a sixth-grade wing. Mountain View's PCHS clinic will also be open to school staff and is open Monday through Friday. Being less geographically spread out and than districts like CK, Bremerton's public transportation will allow students from other schools to get to the Mountain View clinic easier.

"The majority of our kids are familiar with this school and know where it is, and probably feel more comfortable walking into a clinic to receive health services here than on a site someplace else that is not familiar to them," said Iva Scott, assistant superintendent in the Bremerton School District.

How it works

The clinics will be open for the most part between 7:30 a.m. to 4 p.m., allowing for students in the district who don't attend the schools with clinics to be seen before or after school. The clinic schedule will follow the school calendar for holidays and breaks, said PCHS clinical operations director Lynette Bird.

The nurse's offices will remain for standard school-sponsored care, such as scrapes and low-level fevers. Nurses, administrators and counselors will help provide referrals to PCHS for needs beyond the scope of the school nurse.

"This is really for anything you would otherwise go see a doctor or a clinician for," Bowman said. "It's the same idea but we happen to be located at the school and it's more convenient."

The clinics are funded by PCHS, with the schools sponsoring the space. No outside funds were needed to start the clinics, other than one small grant for a few new exam tables, Kreidler-Moss said.

Families will be given consent forms at the start of the school year so that parents can approve their kids to be seen at the PCHS school clinics and provide insurance information. This makes it easier for students who come into the clinic so they don't have to worry about paying for their care during their visit. PCHS accepts all insurance, Kreidler-Moss said.

"In the event that the kid's not covered we have certain funds we can use to offset some of those costs," Kreidler-Moss said. "Largely it's just routine billing, which makes the clinics pretty close to sustainable all on their own."

Accessibility

The clinics are nothing fancy, but they maintain privacy and have all the functions needed for a health clinic, Kreidler-Moss said. The most important part, she said, is that care is accessible.

"From our point of view, I think we have just decided more and more that trying to make everybody come to the clinic on clinic schedule isn't always the best way to deliver care to anyone," Kreidler-Moss said. "If you want to have them be great students sometimes you have to accept that their health and wellness is a big component of them being able to concentrate and focus."

Access to healthcare is important to those on the school side, too.

"Healthcare impacts every aspect of people's lives. If we're struggling with any of those things it's going to affect our ability to get to work, it's going to affect our ability to achieve academically as a student," Bowman said. "Any time you see health improve you see all other aspects of life improve. So every time people have better access to healthcare you see a community healthier. You see people's life satisfaction get better. You see their performance at work and school improve."

"My hope is that all of our kids receive services that they need," Scott said. "Because currently I know they're not, and they could be."

Addressing mental health, substance use

Bringing better mental healthcare to schools was especially important to PCHS and school district staff. According to data from the [Healthy Youth Survey \(http://www.askhys.net/\)](http://www.askhys.net/), Washington ranks 31st for youth behavioral health. In a typical high school classroom of 29 students, data showed two or three of those students attempted suicide in the past year.

Over 230,000 students participated in the Healthy Youth Survey in fall 2018, including over 900 schools, representing all 39 Washington counties and 228 school districts.

Bowman said while doing research for the grant, she found that students were reporting high levels of stress and anxiety and found a large number of adults in the area with "adverse childhood experiences." She also found high rates of drug use in the county, with 11,146 drug-related arrests made in 2018. This data drove the thinking when deciding to open the Esquire Hills clinic to students' families.

"It's not just our kids who are hurting or having these adverse childhood experiences or the stress," Bowman said. "The access of care is not just for the kids, it's the families, it's our community who needs it."

Kreidler-Moss said officials didn't expect the substance use and mental healthcare services to be used at such a high rate at the North Mason clinic, but it shows that the need is there. Now students at Central Kitsap or Bremerton can get intervention for these problems in their school building.

"If we're talking to kids who are maybe starting to experiment with some drug and alcohol use and it's showing up in the classroom we're going to have those services here," Scott said.

Only half of students who participated in the Healthy Youth Survey reported having adults to turn to if they feel sad or suicidal. Kreidler-Moss said a purpose of the clinics is to put more trusted adults in kids' lives.

In 2017, there were 45 suicides by Kitsap County residents, according to data from the Kitsap County Coroner's Office. Three that died that year were between the ages of 15-19, and four that died were between the ages of 20-24.

Bremerton School District has a relationship with Kitsap Mental Health and has school counselors, but Scott said this clinic fills a gap for students who don't need the level of care Kitsap Mental Health provides, but do need more resources than what the school counselors provide.

"PCHS already communicates and collaborates with Kitsap Mental Health so they can refer out when there is a need," Scott said.

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