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In an effort led by Port Angeles Citizen Action Network, North Olympic Healthcare Network is proposing to open a school-based health center at Port Angeles High School. Below, North Olympic Healthcare Network Chief Medical Officer Dr. Katrina Weller talks about the proposed health center.

Health center sought for PA High School

BY JESSE MAJOR
PENINSULA DAILY NEWS

PORT ANGELES — Angie Gooding, an eighth-grade teacher at Stevens Middle School and founder of Port Angeles Citizen Action Network, has seen a student go for months with a sinus infection.

It's one of the reasons she is asking the Port Angeles School Board to allow the North Olympic Healthcare Network (NOHN) to operate a health center at Port Angeles High School, where students could see a provider while they are at school.



Clinic: Too many students seen going without

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Gooding said she has seen too many students go without access to health care and is determined to do something about it.

Some parents will not take their kids to see a doctor while they are ill, which affects how students are able to do in school, she said.

She said she has seen some parents who are more preoccupied with using drugs than taking care of their children. The health center, she said, would give those kids access to health care.

She said on-campus health clinics improve graduation rates, test scores, students' abilities to learn and the overall health at school.

Gooding, high school nurse Marlene Bradow and NOHN Chief Medical Officer Dr. Katrina Weller presented the plans for the proposed

health center during a Port Angeles School District school board meeting last Thursday.

The school board did not take action on the proposed health center, though advocates are hoping the district will approve a memorandum of understanding.

Gooding said she is now collecting signatures on a petition for the health center and asking people to write letters to the school board.

Gooding said the school board had concerns previously about liability, costs and how medical records would be stored, all issues that were addressed during the meeting.

The goal is for the school to provide the space and help with some startup expenses while NOHN would send over a provider, store medical records, deal with scheduling, cover the costs of operating the center and would

be responsible for all liabilities that come with operating a health center, Weller said.

Gooding said it would cost about \$6,000 for all the equipment needed.

Many of the concerns and questions raised during public comment and by school board director Susan Shothafer were how the clinic would address reproductive and mental health.

"Could the board say we don't want contraceptives made available on our campus?" Shothafer asked.

Weller was also asked about abortions and prenatal care for pregnant students.

She said that though reproductive health wouldn't be the health center's focus, NOHN would follow state law and provide contraceptive services for patients and possibly make referrals for abortion.

The health center would

not provide abortions.

While the health center could provide prenatal care, Weller said it might make more sense for NOHN's downtown office to provide that sort of care.

The focus for the health center, she said, would be on basic health needs. That would likely include physicals for student athletes.

Bradow, the nurse at Port Angeles High School, said that while there hasn't been a formal study of how many students would benefit from an on-campus health center, there is a clear need.

She sees about 15 kids each day for a variety of reasons.

She said about 45 percent of the approximately 1,200 high school students are on free or reduced lunch and that many likely don't have health insurance or a regular provider.

Weller, Bradow and Good-

ing hope the health center could start as early as September, though it would need approval from the school board.

They said a supplier of medical supplies has offered steep discounts on what is needed for startup costs and are optimistic the health center would receive a \$7,000 grant to help with the upfront startup costs.

They asked the school board to consider setting aside \$5,000 a year that could be used for capital costs.

Weller said the health center would likely start off being open once a month and would expand as needed.

Parents would have the option to sign consent forms at the beginning of the year for their kids to visit the health center.

While NOHN isn't looking to make a profit off the health center, Weller said it

would need to break even by seeing at least nine students each day.

School board Vice President Sarah Methner asked if NOHN had considered expanding to include students at Lincoln High School — who likely have the highest need for the program.

Weller said if there is a need, expanding to include Lincoln students could likely happen.

She said she would like to see the service expand to once a week or even more times each week.

Weller said NOHN's mission as a Community Health Center is to serve the underserved in the community.

"This is the need of the community and we're going to help serve it," she said. "North Olympic Healthcare Network is there to serve the underserved."