

## **Hopkins High won't open teen clinic**

**By AIMÉE BLANCHETTE**, Star Tribune

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Hopkins High School had been on track to become the first suburban school in the state to house an on-campus clinic for teenagers offering contraception and STD testing.

But plans were derailed after the school board faced complaints that the rights of parents would be undermined and students' sexual activity would increase.

Last week, district officials announced that they would indefinitely postpone discussions on a school-based satellite office of the West Suburban Teen Clinic because they don't believe the board has enough information to make an informed decision.

"As a superintendent, it's my job to ensure that the school board has every angle on the issues and items that are on a board agenda," said Superintendent John Schultz.

District staff proposed opening the branch clinic after the 2007 Minnesota Student Survey results revealed that for the first time, at least half of Hopkins High's seniors reported being sexually active.

Seven people -- most of whom live outside the district -- voiced concerns during discussions at school board meetings this summer. Some worried that a school-based clinic, which would have operated one day a week providing reproductive health services and counseling, would do more harm than good.

"They assume that all teens are going to become sexually active. ... That's low expectations of teens," said Dr. Ross Olson, a retired Minneapolis pediatrician who opposed the teen clinic at an Aug. 21 meeting. "In sports, we expect them to do their best. In academics, if they are potential 'A' students, we don't want them to be 'C' students. In life, we ought to expect the best and we ought to promote the ideal -- one partner for life."

At the Sept. 4 school board meeting, Jamie Bell, a 19-year-old Eden Prairie resident, shared her experiences with the West Suburban Teen Clinic, which is based in Excelsior.

Bell told board members that easy access to the clinic opened the door for her to lie about sex and hide other things from her parents. As Bell became more sexually active, her visits to the clinic increased and she found herself thinking about the classes she could skip to go to the clinic.

"You need to uphold the desires of the parents," she told the board. "My parents tried to protect me, and the clinic took that right away."

Although it's unclear when the school board will discuss the teen clinic again, the school's special services director, Jan Ormasa, will continue to explore the issue and will include the clinic in those discussions.

"We intend to look at what kinds of community partnerships we can build to wrap around the increasing needs of our students," Ormasa said, noting the increasing number of homeless students in the district and uninsured or under-insured students. If the clinic ever becomes a reality, Ormasa said it would also provide other student-health services.

The West Suburban Teen Clinic is primarily a reproductive health

clinic, but the clinic's strategic plan includes adding adolescent-focused primary and acute health services, such as immunizations and school and sports physicals. High schools in Minneapolis and St. Paul offer such clinics, but suburban districts do not.

Teenagers from Hopkins High can still get help from the West Suburban Teen Clinic, but they will have to travel 10 miles to Excelsior to get it. During the 2007-08 school year, 143 Hopkins students visited the Excelsior office for a total of 373 visits. The district serves about 8,000 students from parts of seven west metro communities.

"We are very happy to work closely with Hopkins Schools to build community support, to assess the needs of their students and to provide any help and support we can," said Terry Bosacker, executive director of the clinic. "We will work together with the school to see what a suburban model looks like."

#### Survey results prompt action

District staff proposed a partnership with the West Suburban Teen Clinic to school board members in May after the 2007 Minnesota Student Survey results were released, Ormasa said.

The school board asked staff to outline the relationship between the district and the clinic and to submit a memorandum of understanding to the board before the start of this school year. But by then, plans had been postponed.

Members of the Minnesota Organization on Adolescent Pregnancy, Prevention and Planning (MOAPPP) were disappointed to hear that the clinic wouldn't be opened at Hopkins High.

"A special interest group that doesn't belong in the district came in

and hijacked the meetings," said the organization's executive director, Brigid Riley. "This is a very organized vocal minority who oppose responsible information for young people and they also oppose access to contraception." Only two of the seven people who spoke at meetings to oppose the teen clinic were Hopkins district residents.

Riley said extensive research by MOAPPP has turned up no studies that show providing young people with access to contraception in school increases sexual activity.

Lisa Weisman, a Hopkins School District parent who supports the school-based clinic, said she felt that opponents who were not district residents unduly influenced her elected school board members.

Weisman said she was troubled by the 2007 Minnesota Student Survey data and was proud of the district for tackling the controversial idea of a school-based health clinic.

"As a parent, the message I give my kids is that I don't want them to become sexually active -- postpone it as long as you can -- but there are kids who are sexually active and there's data to prove it. Certainly, there's nothing that derails a teenager more dramatically than an unintended pregnancy."

Still, Weisman said putting the teen clinic plans on hold could prove a positive thing, because parents need to be involved and the school needs community support.

"The school didn't do that and I think that was a mistake on their part," Weisman said. "But it's definitely not too late."

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