



## Hackley Community Care to open teen health center at Muskegon High School

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Lynn Moore | The Muskegon Chronicle

MUSKEGON -- Getting prompt medical and dental treatment is about to get a lot easier for students at Muskegon High School, where a teen health center is expected to open within two months.

The health center will be operated on the high school campus by Hackley Community Care Center. There, students will be able to get urgent care as well as preventive primary care services.

"It's a huge benefit to our students," said Jason McVoy, co-principal at the high school. "The teen health center is going to take away all the barriers our students are facing getting medical and dental care."

Grants and community donations are funding about \$250,000 in renovations to a former shop classroom in the high school's freshmen wing known as the "J Building" and the \$100,000 cost to equip the health center, said Linda Juarez, executive director of Hackley Community Care.

"The needs in the community and the needs at Muskegon Public Schools are just tremendous," Juarez said.

Hackley Community Care currently operates a large medical and dental clinic in Muskegon Heights targeted at people with low incomes.

The 2,500-square-foot teen health center, expected to open around Oct. 1, will have two medical exam rooms, two dental chairs, a waiting room, conference room and room for mental health counseling, Juarez said.

"It will be just like a doctor's office," she said. "It's going to be teen-friendly. We want it to be a place for adolescents to go."

The facility will serve Muskegon school students only during school days. But after school and when school is not in session the year-round clinic will serve other area youth between the ages of 10 and 21.

The clinic will have entrances both from the school corridor and directly from the outside.

Students will be able drop in for care of such ailments as headaches or colds, but also will be able to make appointments. Immunizations, prenatal care, sports physicals, dental care and mental health counseling are among other services that will be offered. Medical care will be provided by a physician's assistant or nurse practitioner and the clinic will be overseen by a physician.

While the school-based clinic won't be able to hand out contraceptives, staff there can discuss birth control options and help students access them at the Muskegon Heights clinic, Juarez has said.

Care will be provided on a sliding fee scale, with most teens qualifying for no to very low copayments, Juarez said. The clinic's operational costs will be funded with reimbursements for care, much of them through Medicaid, she said.

McVoy said letters about the clinic will be sent to students' homes along with parental consent forms required for students to use the clinic. Forms also will be available at student preregistration at the high school, he said.

Attendance and behavior should improve as a result of the clinic's prompt attention to health and mental health issues, McVoy said.

"I see it every day. Attendance is a huge issue because what could be a minor illness can become something much bigger when finances aren't there to get it taken care of," McVoy said. "It's definitely going to improve attendance, and it should improve behavior because kids will be feeling better."

Hackley Community Care, established 18 years ago, has about 17,000 patients and 150 staff, and is "federally qualified" to receive higher reimbursements than typical health providers. Once affiliated with the former Hackley Hospital, it has been independent for the last 10 years.

Juarez said she and her staff are looking at other schools where teen health centers can be established.