

Saginaw school health clinics may benefit from \$100 million in federal grants

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Tom Gilchrist | The Saginaw News

SAGINAW — Earlier this year, Saginaw's Health Delivery Inc. hosted a wine-and-hors d'oeuvres party to raise money toward building a school-based health center at Arthur Hill High School.

Congress, however, is offering its own fare: \$100 million in federal grants available to school-based health centers around the nation, including more than 90 in Michigan.

Centers must apply for the money and Keri Bennett, deputy director of the Lansing-based School-Community Health Alliance of Michigan, said she expects the bidding to be "very competitive."

But \$100 million, even divvied up, is no chicken feed.

"It's wonderful news. We're considering applying for some of the funds," said Angelia D. Williams, director of special projects for Health Delivery Inc., a nonprofit organization hoping to construct the health center at Arthur Hill, 3115 Mackinaw.

Health Delivery Inc. employees say their existing school-based health center inside Saginaw High, 3100 Webber, has reduced student truancy and absenteeism by 40 percent since it opened inside a former woodshop classroom in 2007.

While Saginaw School District officials couldn't confirm the percentage, they agree the school-based health center keeps more kids in school.

About one-third of the state's school-based health centers are at schools in Wayne County, according to Bennett, though some exist in the Upper Peninsula and in the northwest Lower Peninsula, among other areas.

Agencies must apply for the grants by Dec. 1, with about 200 grants awarded next year.

"A lot of our school-based health centers are looking to expand or update their equipment," Bennett said.

Saginaw High's 1,448-square-foot center — with a waiting room, front office, two exam rooms, social worker's room, family nurse practitioner's office, records/storage area and mini-laboratory — is like a doctor's office in a school.

Students visit the Saginaw High center for examinations, immunizations, physical ailments, pregnancy/sexually

transmitted disease testing and mental-health issues such as depression, anxiety and anger.

Health Delivery Inc. officials say they plan a larger health center at Arthur Hill, where a mobile medical unit will return early next year after legislators restored state funds to operate the motor home-style vehicle offering two exam rooms, a laboratory area and a reception area.

State funds also are available for school-based health centers seeking the money, according to Bennett.

"There are a lot of grant opportunities out there right now for Michigan's school-based health centers," Bennett said.

"We really are very lucky considering the economic constraints everybody is facing."

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