Number of school health centers to double

Within the next two years 10 new health centers are planned to open inside Cincinnati Public school buildings, providing health care access to an additional 6,230 low-income students.

That will double the number of school-based health centers in the region's largest district. The district had just four centers in 2005.

The expansion is possible because of a new partnership between non-profit, health care, and government groups and keeps CPS squarely in the lead statewide. Already a third of the 29 centers in the state are located at CPS schools, more than in any other district.

School-based health centers are clinics inside school buildings where students can get vaccinations, dental check ups, eyeglasses and even mental health counseling.

The centers exist nationwide and are meant to expand health care access for the neediest kids in the poorest neighborhoods. Around 73 percent of CPS students are considered poor and 30 percent have chronic health conditions. CPS started creating school-based health centers in 1999. District officials have said the centers have improved state test scores, attendance and and graduation rates at the schools they serve.
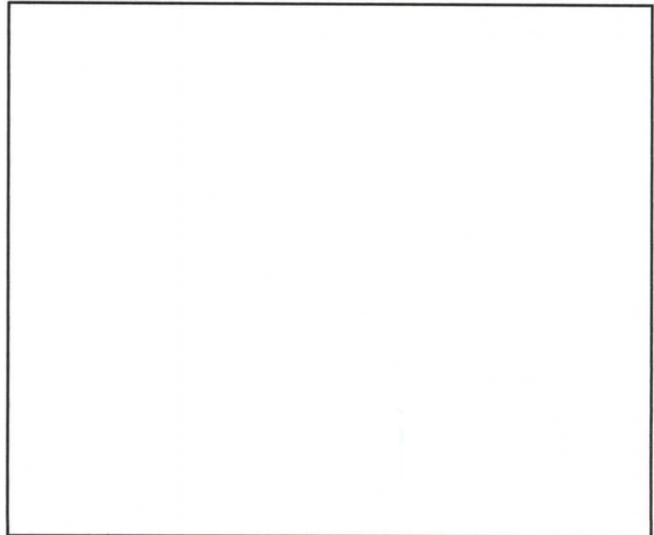
The expansion plan, announced Monday was prompted by sudden funding cuts to the Cincinnati Health Department's school nurse program last year.

The region's health, non-profit, government and district leaders realized they needed a long-term solution for student health care "so we're not at the political whims of decision makers every two to four years," said Rocky Merz, spokesman for the Cincinnati Health Department.

So the Greater Cincinnati Health Foundation partnered with the school district, the Cincinnati Health Department and several other groups under the umbrella of Growing Well Cincinnati, to create a long-term plan to fund student health care.

They started raising money and getting commitments of support from businesses

and health care providers. The Health Foundation currently has enough money to open three to four new centers. Leaders expect to raise enough to start 10 by the end of 2013.

While the partnership did not save all the school nurses, the new health care centers will help fill in the gap left by those cuts, leaders say.

Merz said the expansion plan is an example of what can happen when government works.

"People could have easily thrown up their hands and said we'll just do what we can with what you left us. But we decided to find another way to do this," he said. "It's an example of government working and doing something positive."

How school healthcenters work

In the Cincinnati model, the district, health department or foundation applies for federal grants to build the centers.

The Health Foundation raises the $300,000 to $400,000 in seed money, or startup cash needed to open the center. It recruits businesses to provide funding or services. The Deaconess Foundation is giving $375,000 for the planned center on the Western Hills/Dater campus. Mercy Health Partners and Greater Cincinnati Foundation are giving $25,000 for the planned Pleasant Hill Academy center and the United Way and Greater Cincinnati Foundation are donating $50,000 to plan
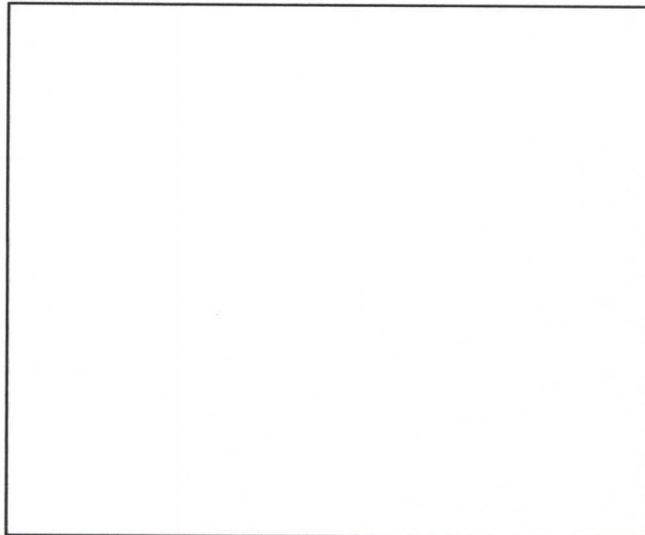
new centers district-wide.

After three to four years, the centers become self-sustaining because there are enough clients that federal Medicaid reimbursements fund salaries of the staff.

Representatives from the National Assembly on School Based Health Care were in town last week to tour the center under construction at the new Oyler School, on Hatmaker Street in Lower Price Hill. Oyler has earned national accolades for its health services and in August will become the first school-based vision center in Ohio.

President Linda Juszczak, said Cincinnati is unique in the way it has managed to leverage local financial support and in how it has meshed its health offerings with its Community Learning Centers – centers within the schools that offer "wrap around" support for low-income kids like tutoring, after school programs and meals.

"It's a .. city with a vision for what school-based health centers can do for children in

"need," she said.

School Based Health Centers in Ohio

Ohio is home to 29 school-based health centers, including 16 in Southwest Ohio. Of them, 10 are in CPS schools.

Butler County

Central Academy

Hamilton County (Cincinnati Public Schools)

Academy of World Languages

Bond Hill Academy

Hughes High School

Oyler School

Rockdale Academy

South Avondale School

William H. Taft Elementary School

Winton Hills Academy

Withrow University and International High School

Woodward Career Technical High School

Hamilton County (non-Cincinnati Public Schools)

Elmwood Place Elementary School

St. Bernard Elmwood Place High School

St. Bernard-Elmwood Place Elementary School

Greater Cincinnati Oral Health Council Mobile Van

Taylor Elementary School

Source: Ohio School-Based Health

Planned health centers

Community groups, Cincinnati Public Schools, the city, local foundations, hospitals, business and state and federal governments are partnering to open 10 more centers in CPS schools by 2013. The Princeton School district also plans t open a center. Here are they locations:
Cincinnati Public Schools:
Western Hills University & Engineering/Dater High School campus, West Price Hill (Deaconess Funding)
John P Parker School, Madisonville
Mount Washington School, Mount Washington
Pleasant Hill Academy, College Hill
Roll Hill Academy, East Westwood
Silverton Paideia Academy, Silverton
Aiken College and Career High School, East Westwood (temporary location)
Ethel M. Taylor Academy, Millvale
Roberts Paideia Academy, E. Price Hill (part time)
Pleasant Ridge Montessori, Pleasant Ridge
Princeton:
Princeton Middle and High Schools
Source: Growing Well Cincinnati