

The role of school health clinics in the health care continuum is recognized by health care and education professionals and organizations, like the Northwest Health Foundation and the Association of Community Mental Health Programs. The Oregon Health Authority points out “SBHC’s provide easily accessible physical, mental, and preventive health services. They keep parents from missing work to take student to health care elsewhere” and that they “are an important part of achieving the state’s health care transformation goals.” When kids aren’t well, they can’t learn up to their potential; they miss school; they go untreated. “The relationship between health and learning is clear and well-established. Physical, mental or social-emotional health problems can impede class time, school attendance and student ability to fully engage in learning.” Just two specific examples of where school clinics can help directly: Youth depression is linked with low academic achievement; and asthma that isn’t controlled well leads to higher rates of absenteeism.

About 2/3 of Oregon’s counties have a certified school-based health center. Umatilla, Union and Baker in NE Oregon; Deschutes, Crook and Wheeler in central; the five southwest Oregon counties; and all but 3 of the counties west of the Cascades.

This bill is the combined efforts of several legislators, and I’d like to thank Representatives Buckley and Reardon, and Senator Steiner Hayward. It takes us a big step forward in helping shape and support SBHC’s, including funding and scope of responsibility. We want to help them operate as cost-effectively as possible using best practices for health care as well as business practices. Most of all, we want to help them continue, and thrive.

School based health centers face new pressures as a result of the health care transformation process. They may be aligning with a medical sponsor, a federally qualified health center, or a CCO; implementing electronic health records or billing systems; and revamping other clinical and business practices. The state and counties have had a relationship with SBHC’s since the 1980’s. It’s time now to provide the statutory framework and legislative direction to ensure coordination as education and health care transformation unfolds. Let’s help SBHC’s continue working as an integral part of the health care system and helping students succeed.