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Pasco schools to open health clinics for workers

By RONNIE BLAIR | The Tampa Tribune

Published: August 18, 2010

Updated: 08/18/2010 02:22 pm

LAND O' LAKES - Three worksite clinics where Pasco County School District employees and their dependents can see a doctor or get lab work done are expected to open by January.

Tuesday evening, the school board approved a contract with CareHere, a Tennessee company that will operate the clinics and provide services such as workers' compensation, drug and alcohol testing, primary care, specialist care, allergy shots and health screenings.

The annual cost to the district is expected to be about \$4 million, but the goal is to save money in the long run by reducing employee health care costs, which totaled more than \$60 million last year.

"I'm just glad to see it finally come about," said school board Chairman Allen Altman, who serves on the board's insurance committee.

The district negotiated with two health-care providers before going with CareHere. Price wasn't the determining factor.

The other company, Novia Care, actually offered a lower administrative fee. CareHere is charging \$23 per employee per month, whereas Novia Care would have charged \$16.

Members of a subcommittee who heard presentations from both companies, though, decided CareHere's track record made up for the added expense. CareHere has more experience with workers' compensation cases and handling employers the size of the school district, according to a district memorandum.

The school district has about 10,000 employees.

In addition to the administrative fee, the district is responsible for the operating costs of the clinics, including payroll for medical personnel, supplies and utilities. Those expenses will be billed to the district by CareHere. The medical personnel won't be district employees.

Mary Tillman, the district's director of employee benefits, said the location of the clinics hasn't been decided, though they will be spread out across the county. They could be at schools or in other school district buildings.

Employees who are insured through the district and their eligible dependents will be able to use the clinics, as will retirees and COBRA participants. Whether noninsured employees could use the clinics is still being discussed.

The three clinics are just the beginning.

"I think eventually we are going to need at least six, maybe seven," Tillman said.

Reporter Ronnie Blair can be reached at (813) 259-7065.

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Posted by (oobster) on 08/18/2010 at 09:26 pm.

If the school district is genuinely interested in reducing health care costs, I would suggest the following. Forget about having a private provider run a publicly funded health care program (haven't we learn anything from the level of fraud in the Medicare system) Instead, have the plan participants pay their fair share that is consistent with the private sector. Secondly, employees that are married would not be offered individual plans nor monetarily compensated for opting out. Last, hire a consultant to review the current health plan to insure that only plan participants that are eligible to receive benefits, get benefits. I wouldn't be surprised if 5% of those enrolled are not eligible for benefits. Pay that consultant a percent of the money they save, rather than a fee, and I'm sure the money saved will eclipse the money hopefully saved from the approved plan. At a minimum, the District needs to better communicate their plan for oversight and audit.

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Posted by (hercules550) on 08/19/2010 at 09:50 am.

What plans have been made to gauge the effectiveness of this program?

How will results be communicated to the taxpaying public and how frequently?

What is the term of the agreement?

Why will we need more of these clinics?

What exactly does the taxpayer get for 4 million dollars? It seems not much, as the district continues to bear the brunt of the expenses of program administration.

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