

Clinic

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care for children of students in the affiliated day-care program.

Parental consent would be required before any student could be treated at the clinic, according to Dr. Eric Schaff, a member of the advisory group and project director of the Anthony Jordan Teen Center.

A sample consent form handed out at the forum detailed the types of health care the clinic might offer. At the bottom of the form were categories of services from which parents could exclude their children. Those included diet counseling, a pregnancy prevention program, pregnancy testing, dental screening, drug and alcohol counseling and treatment of sexually transmitted diseases, among others.

Parents who consented to treatment of their children would be notified when and for what conditions their children were treated. The only exception would be in the case of sexually transmitted diseases, for which confidentiality is mandated by law. However, students would be urged to discuss such treatment with their parents.

Clinic staff would notify parents of the results of pregnancy tests, but would not offer abortion counseling. Nor would the clinic dispense contraceptives. Instead, students would be given vouchers or prescriptions, according to Dr. Schaff. "We don't want to be known as a 'pill clinic,'" he said.

"We are really hoping to optimize parental involvement and address the needs of teens."

None of the five parents who attended last Thursday's forum voiced strong objections to the plan. Several other speakers complained that the proposal's November 1 deadline does not allow for adequate involvement on the part of parents or students.

Rivera agreed that time is short. If the proposal is accepted, he pointed out, a year-long planning period would allow for further parent and community involvement in deciding what services the clinic would offer.

But James McCuller, executive director of Action for a Better Community, Inc., and a member of the Teen Pregnancy Coalition, said the foundation's very specific guidelines do not leave much room for choices later on.

"Folks need to be aware that there are already some things on the table they're going to be saying yes or no to with this ... and the meaning of 'comprehensive health services' should be on the table," he said.

Dr. Mario Caceres, executive director of the Ibero-American Action League, said he spoke on behalf of parents who fear losing control over their families. "This process is moving ahead pretty fast, but parents and community agencies are not sure what their part is — what is going to happen," he said. "This explanation doesn't tell you when you're going to be called or what are the procedures (for consultation)."

Other speakers suggested that students be more involved in planning for the clinic and that a parent should be on the clinic staff to

serve as a liaison to other parents.

Charmaine Bennett, a family life education consultant, said she favored the proposal so long as it really offers comprehensive care and not just family planning services masked as such. She noted that the community has been largely unaware of a clinic operated by Threshold at Franklin Junior-Senior High School for the past four years, which has dispensed contraceptives.

A large proportion of Jefferson's 1,100 students are minorities. Bennett said she

hoped that population would not be "used, abused or misused."

"I hope they'll stress education as a preventive measure," she said. "I hope we are as interested in our children's brains as we are in their reproductive systems."

The city school board is expected to vote on the clinic proposal at its October 20 meeting. In the meantime, diocesan officials and members of the Teen Pregnancy Coalition plan to study the proposal and offer their reactions to the board.

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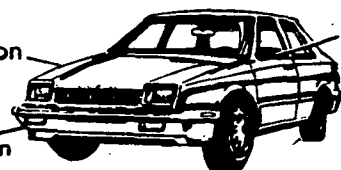
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