

Westchester health center banks \$1.5M to expand school-based work

Open Door Family Medical Center, a federally qualified health center in Westchester, is continuing to grow its school-based care.

Its school-based health centers will use a five-year, \$1.5 million grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration to prevent substance abuse among children and families in the Ossining school district.

The funding will help 5,000 students in grades four through 12, Open Door said. It comes at a time when surveys show rates of e-cigarette, marijuana and alcohol use are rising among middle and high school students in the district.

"The grant provides much-needed support to continue our work with Ossining Communities That Care Coalition in working together to develop and implement sustainable approaches," said Helene Kopal, director of substance-use disorder programs at Open Door, in a statement. "This is about prevention; it's taking a public health approach to deal with risk by creating positive attitudes and community norms to head off use."

Open Door has operated school-based services for about 15 years. It now has eight school-based health centers.

"School-based health is challenging because so often our schools just don't have the facilities," Lindsay Farrell, president and CEO of Open Door, recently told Crain's.

Aside from work to head off substance abuse, provide immunizations and help children return to school faster after illness, the centers have reduced the collective number of days students with asthma missed at Port Chester elementary schools from a high of 376 days in 2014 to 28 days in 2017.

"We're focused on prevention," Farrell said. "That's the name of the game."