

Fattening the wallet through wellness

By JEROD CLAPP

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JEFFERSONVILLE — Employees of Greater Clark County Schools might save some money on doctor visits soon, which could pay big dividends for the district.

Taking the beginning steps for establishing two employee wellness clinics in the district, the board of trustees recently approved a three-year contract with Wellness For Life. The company has set up and managed clinics in other school districts across the state.

Along with keeping employees from paying copays for visits, prescriptions and some lab tests, the move is estimated to save the district \$1 million in insurance claims annually before the cost of the clinics is factored in. Andrew Melin, superintendent, said employees could find it easier to visit the clinics — one proposed in Jeffersonville and another to serve Charlestown and New Washington — during the school day than setting up doctor appointments. “If we can give flu shots in our clinics as opposed to people having to go to other places for them, that’s convenient for our employees,” Melin said. “We want them at work, we don’t want them missing work because of illness.” Though flu shots won’t be available initially, Melin said they could add that service later. The clinics would cost the district about \$879,000 annually, saving about \$121,000 a year in insurance claims. Melin said though startup costs — which haven’t been determined yet — would be associated with building sites or remodeling existing buildings, the savings in prescription costs alone could recoup those costs in a month’s time. Danny Tanoos, superintendent of Vigo County Schools in Terre Haute, said his district is in their third year of using wellness clinics through Wellness For Life.

He said a vast majority of their 2,500 employees use the clinics have had a lot of positive feedback on them. “Ours has been a grand slam for our school system,” Tanoos said. “Our usage is the highest possibly in the state or the country, it’s well over 85 percent of our employees. The other part of it is that all of their medications are free and so are their office visits.”

He said they’re nearing the end of the three-year contract with Wellness For Life and expects the district to continue their agreement with them.

“I don’t think they’d go with anyone else,” Tanoos said. “I think my employees would probably put me out of office if we did. I receive on a weekly basis an email, letter or call from someone who’s been to the clinic and said they’ve had a great experience.”

Melin said another possibility for employees — and for the district to generate revenue — is to set up a fee structure for spouses of employees who may not have insurance to visit the clinics.

Tony Hall, Greater Clark school board member, said he hopes the district would consider adding regular physicals for athletes on the list of services provided by the clinics.

Melin said there are a number of ways they could broaden the agreement to include more services. “That is a possibility that we could pursue with Wellness For Life,” Melin said. “We talked about offering those kinds of services. If we had to expand hours, we’d have to come back to you if there’s a need for that. We’d have to ask them for a cost for that versus our self-insurance fund. They’re prepared to help us in any way we need it.”