

Drug help for kids



PHOTO BY SALLY MORROW

William Floyd school board president Robert Vecchio, center, speaks about plans for a new drug clinic at a meeting last night.

- William Floyd plans to house clinic at high school
- Proposal follows surge in teen opiate abuse

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Faced with growing numbers of students in need of help for drug and alcohol addictions, the William Floyd School District announced at a school board meeting last night a plan to house a substance abuse treatment clinic at its high school — the only such treatment facility in the state.

The outpatient clinic, which still must receive state approval, would represent the most dramatic step a Long Island district has taken since a recent surge in teenage opiate abuse seized the attention of parents, teachers and administrators.

"It's time to bring these services to the community," said

Robert Vecchio, school board president. Spectators asked questions about the plan but expressed no major concerns.

Drug treatment experts said the company running the program at no expense to the district, Huntington Station-based nonprofit Daytop, must take extra steps to protect student privacy and closely monitor those in treatment with friends — relationships, especially romantic ones, can affect treatment. Students can pay for it through their parents' health insurance.

"I see privacy as a major obstacle they have to navigate very carefully," said Richard Buckman of Long Island Friends of Recovery, an advocacy group.

But Buckman and others generally applauded the idea. "If

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they can do this the right way, they can make it a model," said Jeffrey Reynolds, executive director of the nonprofit Long Island Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence.

In a Nov. 4 state license application, Daytop said it would have capacity for 60 patients for group and individual counseling and pay \$18,000 a year to lease a 150-square-foot suite in the 3,200-student school. The program would not dispense drugs, and only William Floyd students may be treated there, officials said. Admissions would include walk-ins, referrals from school counselors and those mandated by court.

The facility would likely be housed in the school's counseling center. Officials said student confidentiality would be guarded carefully; records would be kept by Daytop and not shared with the school.

Officials at the state Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services, which licenses treatment facilities, said Monroe County schools upstate experimented with treatment programs in the 1990s, but have since discontinued them for reasons unclear yesterday.

"This is really groundbreaking," said Caroline Sullivan, Daytop's managing director. "We need to move away from the model of people coming to us. We need to reach out and be where they are."

Vecchio said William Floyd students struggling with addiction are often hurt by lack of public transit in an area bereft of treatment centers. The program's application says the

nearest program to the school is 2 miles away and not accessible by public transit.

Treatment admissions for all types of drugs have increased in recent years, across the state and on Long Island. A series of heroin deaths prompted school districts from Smithtown to Massapequa to hold mandatory forums, and prevention specialists are now in many schools.

At William Floyd, students found in possession of drugs have "increased exponentially" in the last two years, resulting in 38 hearings and many long-term suspensions, said Principal Robert Feeney in a memo contained in Daytop's state application. "Every school — every community — is dealing with the issue of addiction," said Vecchio, an original proponent of the new program. "We know that needs are being unmet in our area in particular. It's about accessing services."